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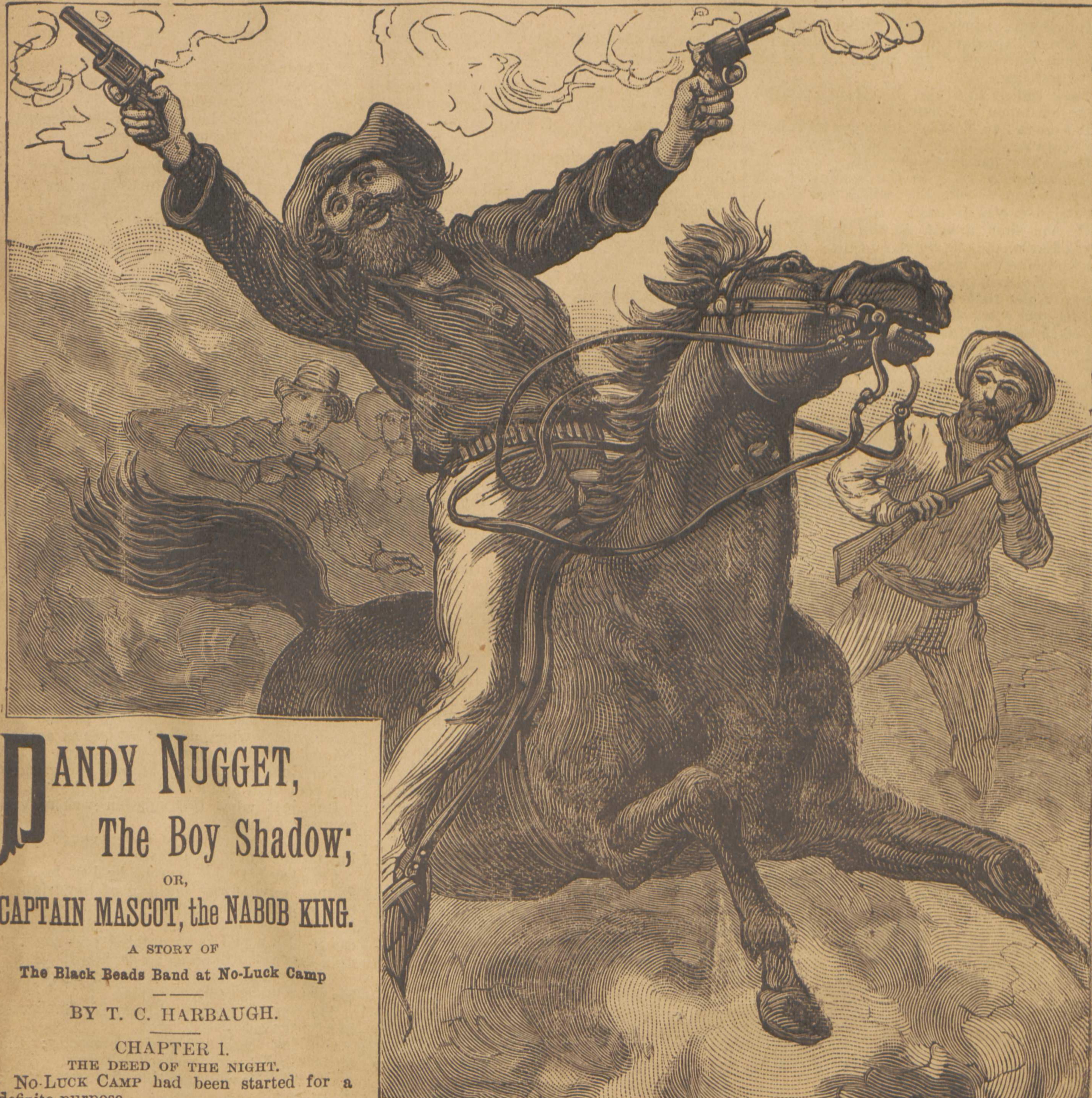
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DANDY NUGGET,
The Boy Shadow;
OR,
CAPTAIN MASCOT, the NABOB KING.

A STORY OF
The Black Beads Band at No-Luck Camp

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEED OF THE NIGHT.

No-LUCK CAMP had been started for a
definite purpose.

There was gold in the vicinity; mines had

DOWN THE STREET CAME GOLLIDAY FIRING HIS SIX-SHOOTERS INTO THE AIR.

been opened before the camp came into existence, but for all this, there was another reason why it should stand where it did.

On the side of the mountain that frowned down upon the camp was to be found a lone grave.

It had been inclosed with a little fence, and within this inclosure some hand had planted the fairest flowers that perfumed the air, and now and then the grass was mowed by some unseen hand, as if the mower wanted to keep his identity concealed.

It was a tough place was No-Luck.

Men had been dying there with their boots on ever since the founding of the camp.

It seemed to be a Mecca for the toughest of the tough, and pistols almost nightly spoke the doom of some one.

Paul Paget was the richest citizen of No-Luck.

He was a youth just entering his twentieth year, and had risen to affluence by sheer luck, so all said.

The mines he owned were the best, and they paid him a thousand per cent.

Handsome, fearless, and rather jolly, he had the full freedom of the camp, and with the men who worked the mines for him his word was law.

Some called him the Mountain Czar and there were men who hated the boy.

In a camp like No-Luck some one must hate his neighbor or things will not go well.

Paul Paget had made enemies.

A few months prior to the opening of our story he had a difficulty which was almost sure to give him trouble.

He had shot a man at the steps of the Black Eagle, the one hotel, so-called, of No-Luck, and he had been "posted."

To post a man in No-Luck meant business; it meant also that there was danger for the posted one wherever he went, and he stood in the shadow of sudden death at all hours.

Paul's circumstances did not shield him.

He was doomed from the moment of the posting, and when he saw the notice which had been nailed in the night to the door of his own house, with a six-inch bowie driven through it, he felt that he had an implacable foe.

And the man he had shot?

He was a veritable tough, a man called Captain Mascot, and known as a Nabob King, though his riches came, it was said, from unknown mines and outlawry.

By and by this same Captain Mascot came to No-Luck to live.

This seemed to be a challenge on his part, but days rolled on and no meeting came of his coming.

Paul Paget came and went as usual.

If he watched Captain Mascot no one knew it.

They met on the street and nodded as if they had no ill feelings in common, but afterward Captain Mascot was seen to lower his brow and to look dark.

All this, they said who saw it, meant that a meeting was coming in the near future.

One night the looked-for came.

Gold Golliday, a man well known throughout the region, and a strange man besides, stumbled over a human body in the darkness and fell back with a cry.

The next moment he was bending over the thing and a match showed him that he had found Paul.

Paul Paget had been killed by some unseen hand and his body lay near the mouth of his best mine.

Golliday picked it up and carried it down the main street of No-Luck.

The mountaineer was a giant and his tall figure showed in the lights that flashed from the free-and-easies which he passed until their boisterous inmates came to the doors and stared at him.

He did not stop till he reached the long porch of the Black Eagle where lounged the toughs of the camp.

Golliday carried his burden up the steps and halted on the porch.

Men looked at him and at his load.

"It's Paul—Paul," said the man, red-shirted and dark of face, with his large eyes and long beard. "D'ye want to know where I found him? Down by the Red Mine, lying on his back looking at the stars he could not see. Dead? Of course—just as he is now."

They crowded round the giant and he laid his burden reverently on the boards while he drew back and surveyed the crowd.

"It was a dastardly trick," came from between Golliday's lips.

No one spoke.

"I say it was as mean a trick as was ever done in No-Luck and it ought to curse the camp forever."

Those who heard him seemed to look at one another, but still not a word was spoken.

"Don't want 'im here, I reckon," and the man raised the body once more and trotted off with it. "We'll know some time who did this," he grated. "We'll know if it takes every life in No-Luck and don't you forget it."

They watched him out of sight and then the crowd on the porch seemed to come together.

There were whisperings along the porch and heads met while eyes flashed or twinkled, just as the death of Paul struck their owners.

Golliday did not stop until he had carried the dead body home.

He came out of the house and stopped, for some one had risen in his path before him.

"Who did it, Golliday?"

The mountain giant fell back and looked at the speaker.

A young girl stood before him—a girl not more than seventeen, well formed and beautiful.

"What, have you found it out already?" asked Golliday, bending forward.

"It's all over No-Luck already, and I want to know what you think."

"Wait till I get my second wind. I found him myself and I never stopped to look about, but just picked him up and carried him down to the Eagle. Will you go back with me, Vinon?"

"To where you found him? Yes."

They walked back together, the tall figure of Gold Golliday presenting a striking contrast to that of the girl as well known in No-Luck as he was.

They did not speak until the bronzed hand of Gold Golliday fell upon Vinon's arm and she looked up into his face.

"Here's where it was," said he, pointing to the ground. "This is the spot. You will have to light a match, girl. No, I'll do that," and the little flame sprung at once into being and the giant held it near the ground.

Vinon got down and looked with all eyes. She was very fair and had a fine face which had gained for her the name of Rosy Vinon.

No one knew her history.

She had drifted into No-Luck—drifted thither in the night—blown in, as it were, for a storm had raged for three days, and at the end of that time some one had found a wagon near the camp and near it two horses, dead from exposure.

In that wagon were two persons, a dead woman and a little child, the latter Vinon and the other, presumably, her mother.

Without a name she became Rosy Vinon—Vinon for short, and she had grown up among the roughs and toughs of No-Luck, the purest flower in the mountains.

There was on the girl's face while she examined the ground an expression of resolution.

The keen eyes of Golliday saw it, but he said nothing.

The two found nothing by their search. Vinon rose at last and touched the man's arm.

"How was he killed? Did you look into that part of it, Golliday?"

"It must have been done with this," was the reply and the right hand of the giant opened and shut close to the girl's face.

"Strangled?"

"Just so—'thugged' they would call it in some parts of the world."

"Do you think—"

Vinon paused and did not resume.

"It's all dark now, but we'll bring light, light, girl, out of it. My pard isn't here, but he'll come. You don't know him, but you ought to."

"Who is he?"

"Dandy Nugget, the Boy Shadow of No-Luck Camp. He can smell out the mysterious and he will come. I've seen him tried, but not right in this region. I'll pit him against the best of them—I know the boy detective!"

"But they will prove too much for him here."

"D'ye think so girl? I don't. By Jove! you don't know Dandy Nugget."

"When will he come?"

"When I summon him and I'll do that now."

"Where is he?"

"I know," answered Golliday mysteriously and then he turned away.

"They killed him to settle some score," said Vinon. "He had enemies."

"Of course."

"You know he shot Captain Mascot?"

"Yes, and it's a pity he didn't more than wing him," replied the big man. "But it's not that I'm thinking of just now, Vinon. Let me think."

She drew off and watched him in the faint light that prevailed.

"Now, say nothing. They will raise Cain over this murder. It will shake No-Luck from center to circumference. It will breed bad blood. It will make bad work here and elsewhere. You liked the boy—"

Vinon had flushed.

"I knew it," continued Golliday. "It was all right. He was a fine fellow, worth his weight in gold, and at times a little hasty. It was his temper got him into this his last tiff with the toughs. But, it calls for vengeance all the same, and now's my time to make the crusade."

Vinon looked at the man, wondering what his last words meant.

His crusade?

"Good-by!" continued Golliday. "When we come back there will be the greatest man-hunt these hills hev ever seen!"

CHAPTER II.

THE COMING OF DETECTIVE DANDY.

As we have said, Golliday was a character.

A man whose ancestry was unknown to all save himself, he seemed to have drifted out among the lawless, and as lawless as any he roamed at will among the gold camps in the Bitter Root Mountains, known everywhere as a cool head and a man with a mission.

But just what this mission was no one seemed to know.

It was said that it was a vengeance hunt, but no one knew for certain.

Golliday kept his secrets; he had no confidants, gave away nothing of importance, but, mounted on his horse, he would sweep through No-Luck at odd times, startling the camp with a yell as he entered and sending up a farewell whoop as he departed.

Such was the man who found Paul near his mine underneath the stars.

The day after the discovery No-Luck was in a turmoil.

Golliday had prophesied correctly; the murder had excited the whole camp.

Captain Mascot and his followers took things very cool.

If they knew anything about the deed they said nothing, and the dark looks direct-

ed at the head of the gang by those who had been in Paul's employ went for a good deal. Vinon, the girl, known all over the camp as Paul's "friend," went to his house and helped to dress the body for the mountain graveyard.

It was her hand that smoothed the dark hair for the last time and hers that placed on his bosom a mountain rose.

She did this with compressed lips and a white face.

Those who saw her noticed that she was strangely silent all the time, and that when all was over, she went back to her little home in the heart of No-Luck and shut the door.

Captain Mascot the Nabob King was seated in his own house at a table upon which lay papers and charts.

He was not alone.

Across the table stood a man with a red shirt and a dark, homely face.

He wore a belt about his waist and in it stuck two revolvers prominently displayed.

He watched Captain Mascot, who was singularly handsome and cool at all times, and waited for that dignitary to speak.

"You will find the old trail, Saul," spoke the captain at last, looking up. "You know where the pass is and how to get to it?"

"I guess I kin find it," was the reply. "But, aren't you afraid to be left alone here?"

"Alone?" and the man smiled. "I won't be alone, you see, Saul. I never am alone, no matter where I am. The Beads who protect me are omnipresent."

"Just so, cap'n. They're willing to stand by you through thick and thin. I'll go and look for the old place."

"Which you must find," and Captain Mascot tossed the old chart toward Black-Handed Saul. "Take that along. You may need it if you get confused. Take the trail to the right after you emerge from Dead Man's Pass."

"Yes."

"Follow it well, but the arrows on the chart will show you where to go. And here is the most important of all. Don't lose this, but don't look at it till you're beyond the Pass."

Another object, this time something incased in buckskin, was thrown to the man, whose dark hand seized it.

"That's the real key, and I wouldn't trust it to any living man but you, Saul. It will give you the clue after you have struck the right trail. You ought to get back by day after to-morrow."

"If I have luck, cap'n."

"Luck?" cried Captain Mascot. "Why, man, you must have nothing else! We're intrenched here now; we can't be rooted out of No-Luck, and here we sink or swim, and it must be 'swim.'"

A smile overspread Black-Handed Saul's face.

"I hope so, cap'n; I hope so," he answered, and the next moment he had fallen back to the door.

Captain Mascot watched his man until he was gone.

"The time has come at last to find the treasure," said he aloud to himself. "It's in my hands now, and nothing shall take it from me. I'm going to be master here, more of a master than Paul was. I am more calculated to rule than he was, and there lives no man who can break the power of Captain Mascot!"

It did him good to talk thus, even to himself.

He took a cigar from the box among the charts and began to smoke.

Meantime Saul had left the house.

He was a cool head and a man of powerful stature.

Everybody knew him as Captain Mascot's right-hand man, and he deserved the title.

Striding across the little square in the

heart of No-Luck Camp, Black-Handed Saul glanced toward the Black Eagle, upon whose porch had already gathered the first loafers of the day.

He knew them all. He had seen them tried in more than one dark encounter both with whites and Indians, and all had seen him show his pluck.

But, something more than the toughs of No-Luck attracted Saul's attention.

His gaze became riveted upon a youth who stood apart from the men at one end of the long, low porch.

He had evidently just arrived.

His trowsers bore signs of the saddle and his boots were covered with the dust of the mountain trails.

To complete the evidence of recent coming there stood, in the shadow of the hotel, a horse still saddled.

It was a wiry black, with fox-like ears and keen, watchful eyes, a superb mane and a grand figure.

Black-Handed Saul saw boy and horse at the same time.

"What does that mean?" cried the man, turning aside and going toward the hotel. "That boy must just have come in and—"

He broke his own sentence, for just then a wild whoop sounded on the air and Saul looked down the street.

At first he saw a cloud of dust; then a man and horse.

The rattle of hoofs amid the dust thus raised greeted the desperado's ears and he stopped to look.

"It's the wild wretch of the hills," he ejaculated. "It's the man we've got to finish some time before we can have peace. Golliday, one of these days you'll cease to cut a swath through No-Luck and the mountain graveyard or the vultures will get you."

It was a sight calculated to stir up one's blood for down the street, sitting in a Western saddle and swinging his long revolvers above his head, came toward the hotel the object of many a man's attention.

No-Luck had put up with Golliday's antics nearly long enough.

He had ridden through the camp firing off his revolvers as he went until forbearance had ceased to be a virtue, and his coming was sure to cock more than one weapon and men ran out of the cabins, eager to unseat the strange man in case he did anything bordering on the destruction of life or property.

Down the street came Golliday, on this occasion, firing his six-shooters into the air and now and then yelling at the top of his lungs.

He was a typical desperado, but always good-natured and full of sunshine.

His red shirt with its open sleeves showed like a crimson emblem in the sunlight, and as he came on with dust around him he fired at the sky, while more than one man followed him with ready weapons which did not intimidate him for a second.

Black-Handed Saul's brow clouded while he watched this man.

He had no love for Gold Golliday. He hated the man who kept his own secrets and who had said that some day he would settle an old score to the detriment of some so-called gentlemen.

Golliday's ride ended in front of the Black Eagle.

He drew rein at the porch and let off his last yell.

Those on the porch looked at him and some smiled.

His hands still gripped the revolvers, and he gazed at the toughs of No-Luck with bubbling curiosity.

He did not seem to see the boy at all.

"Guess I'll go in a minute," said Gold Golliday, springing from his steed and striding across the open ground. "Had a murder here last night. I'm the man what

found the body, you know. I am Gold Golliday of Echo Canyon."

No one had ever taken the trouble to find just where Echo Canyon was, therefore this strange man had not been molested, and when he sprung upon the porch he stopped and took a hasty survey of its occupants.

"Why don't you hang somebody?" he demanded.

No one said anything.

"You heard me, eh?" and he leaned toward the man crowd. "Why don't you pull some one up to the tree yonder?"

"Wouldn't you wait till we had found the right man, Golliday?" asked some one at the edge of the crowd.

"Of course," responded the tall tough. "It wouldn't do to pull up the nearest man, for he mightn't be the right one; that's a fact, I say. But, you won't do it. You men wouldn't hang the right man if you could."

This was a taunt with a sting in it, and it had its effect.

Some of the men on the porch seemed to throw their hands toward their revolvers, but the hands of Golliday seemed too near his own weapons for them.

Black-Handed Saul had come near enough to hear the taunt, and his face grew darker than ever.

"He's settling his own hash and doing it rapidly," he muttered. "Wait till I come back from the mission. Just wait till I am here again; then we'll see who runs No-Luck."

Golliday looked toward Saul and seemed to catch his eye.

"Why don't you hang the man who did it?" he repeated.

Saul bit his lower lip almost through.

"Not now; it won't do," he murmured. "You can't draw me into a fight, Golliday. I'm going off. Just wait till I come back—it won't be long. Then we'll see who's master here. But the boy yonder. I've seen him before; but where?"

Black-Handed Saul turned and walked away.

At the same time the eyes of the youth at the end of the porch seemed to alight upon him, and they followed him until he was no longer visible.

"Black-Handed Saul," said the boy. "That is one of the men I'll have to face. I'd bet my head on that. The crime I am to run to earth belongs to the merciless Black Beads, and I have just seen one of them."

He was cool and steel-nerved, for nerve was needed in the desperadoes' stronghold.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLACK BEADS.

DETECTIVE DANDY was right.

Black-Handed Saul belonged to the Black Beads.

This was a secret organization which had a history already red; it had left its mark on many a mining-camp throughout the far West, terrorizing what otherwise would have been a peaceful settlement, and breaking up more than one happy home.

Its members were said to wear on the left arm and above the elbow a bracelet of black beads, hence the name of the order.

Their numbers were not known, and for most part no one knew the men themselves; but their deeds told where they were, and the crimes which, on more than one occasion had been traced to them, had roused righteous indignation in many quarters.

Black-Handed Saul, always ready to obey the behest of Captain Mascot, kept on the trail which led from No-Luck Camp.

On the mountain he turned and looked down upon the collection of cabins which made up the place, and at last turned away again.

He was reluctant to depart on his mission, as if he feared that he might be needed at

at home; he looked a long time at the camp, and even then walked on, half resolved to throw up his mission and lurk in the shadow of No-Luck.

The day waned, and near its close a little company followed the corpse of Paul to the mountain.

It was a quiet burial.

The sun went down as the *cortege* came back and its mourners scattered in the streets of No-Luck.

Golliday turned toward Vinon's house and entered without knocking.

The girl was at home, and her face, which was clouded, seemed to light up with hope as the burly figure of the mountaineer came in.

"Well," said Golliday, "it's all over, and now begins our hunt!"

"That is true," responded Vinon. "Now begins the hunt for vengeance!"

The giant came forward and leaned against the little table, while he folded his brawny arms.

"Has he been here yet?" he asked.

The girl shook her head.

"He said he would drop in, and I didn't know but what I would find him here."

"He's not come yet."

That instant footsteps were heard just beyond the door, and it opened to reveal the form of Dandy Nugget.

"Here at last," was Golliday's welcome, as the boy came forward.

Dandy Nugget took the hand which Vinon held out with a smile, and held it for half a second.

She had never seen him until that day. She might have heard of him; but this was their first meeting, and the introduction had been through Golliday.

"Would you watch at the window, Vinon?" asked the giant, looking toward the girl.

Vinon rose and crossed the room to come to a halt at the window from which she could see the Square and, beyond it, the hotel.

Golliday went over to the table at which Dandy Nugget had seated himself.

Boy and man put their heads together there and began to talk in low tones.

It was an earnest conversation, as their looks and tones showed, and Vinon, glancing now and then at the pair, seemed to realize that much depended on them.

"It was done by one of the Beads," asserted the boy detective, taking from his pocket something that glistened in the candle-light.

Golliday turned it over and over in his hand, seeing that it was a black bead quite small and well worn.

"You picked this up—where, Dandy?"

"Where you found him."

"Near the mine?"

Dandy Nugget nodded.

"It is the first clue, eh? It is the mark of the Black Beads, I see."

There was no reply, but the eyes of the young mountain ferret fairly shone.

"Did you trace it further? Did you look beyond where you picked this up?"

"Do you think I would stop there, Golliday?" asked the lad. "I don't think you would have done so."

"I would have looked into it as far as possible."

"Of course you would."

"You did so. Well, what did you discover?"

Dandy Nugget was about to reply when a slight call from Vinon at the window attracted them.

Both turned and saw the girl looking toward them.

"What is it?"

Vinon beckoned to them and both the boy and Golliday went forward.

"That man has been out yonder for some little time," said Vinon. "You have

to look sharp to see him against the shanty over there. He came from toward the Square, though I am quite sure he did not cross it as I could have seen him in the light."

"I see him. He has folded his arms and is watching this shanty," spoke Golliday.

"He is built like Captain Mascot."

"But it is not the Nabob King," interposed Vinon. "I know him too well to call that man him."

"She is right, Dandy. That man out yonder isn't Captain Mascot."

The man in the shade of the shanty continued to stand there with his dark face turned toward the cabin and seemed a statue in the semi-darkness.

He did not move an inch, as if he had turned into stone since taking up his station, and, while the three occupants of Vinon's house watched him, he watched the shanty like a hawk.

"He knows we're here," whispered Golliday.

"That he does!"

"That marks you, boy!"

Dandy Nugget nodded, with a fearless smile.

"They know that you are here to bring the truth to light. You may have been recognized; you have made so many enemies, you know."

"So I have, Golliday. There are many men who don't like a hair of my head."

For ten minutes the man outside continued to look at the cabin before he showed any signs of life. Then he moved slightly and the trio at the window got a look at his profile.

"I know him now!" cried the girl.

"Who is he, Vinon?"

"It is Tolliver Trumps."

"Oh," said Dandy, with a nod. "It is Tolliver, then?"

"Do you know him?"

"Don't I!" and the boy shadower laid his hand on Golliday's rugged arm. "Don't I know the man who, two years ago, was hung in a basket over a cliff in Arizona by a lot of Indians. I know Tolliver."

"Look, he is moving off now. No, he is coming closer. He is determined to look inside."

Indeed it seemed so, for the man approached the cabin and at last his bearded face appeared at the window, almost touching the pane as his glittering eyes seemed to dart against the glass like the forked tongue of a serpent.

The inmates of the shanty had drawn back out of the light, and Golliday, with his hand on his half-drawn revolver, watched the spy's face till it was withdrawn.

"Now go back to your master and report," said Dandy Nugget, in low tones. "What have you seen anyhow? This may be better than dangling one thousand feet above the ground in a wicker basket; but the end may be more terrible still."

They could hear departing footsteps, and at last caught a glimpse of the man who stole across the Square to vanish toward the Black Eagle whose light fell half-way across the Plaza.

"Let him go," said Golliday turning to the boy ferret with a smile. "What is the state of affairs among Paul's friends?"

"They are cowed—cowed by the hand that struck their young master down."

"They are cowards all, then?"

"Not yet, though they are cowed; they fear the hand, that is all. They won't discuss the murder; they will turn the subject as quickly as possible. They think of the Black Beads, yet they will not openly accuse."

"What," cried Vinon, "do the men of No-Luck—Paul's friends—even refuse to avenge him?"

"They will not talk about it," replied Dandy Nugget.

"That is cowardice!"

Vinon's eyes seemed to get a flashing light.

"I will fire them," cried she. "I will show them that there is one person in No-Luck who is not disposed to see that murder go unpunished."

"That belongs to Golliday's crusade," put in that individual. "I will discuss this murder at the right time whether they care to listen or not."

"But when will that time come?"

"Sooner than you think, girl."

"To-night? to-morrow?"

"Wait and see."

"You have taken up your quarters at the Black Eagle have you, Nugget?"

"I can be found there."

"Let me see the bead again."

The boy shadower complied and Golliday turned the bead over and over in his hand again.

"You know the story—thirty-nine beads. The missing bead will fasten the crime upon the guilty."

The boy dropped his head.

"But more have been lost where you found that one," exclaimed Vinon.

"I looked well, Vinon," answered Dandy.

"He has eyes like a hawk and he sees as well by night as by noonday," remarked Gold Golliday. "There was but one bead lost there and this is it."

Vinon looked at the bit of glossy ebony and turned to the boy shadower.

"If you should find the guilty, how will you punish?" she asked. "The Black Beads may be all powerfull in No-Luck Camp. The King of Trumps is a desperado of the first water and behind him may be the coolest heads in Idaho."

"That belongs to my crusade, girl," declared Golliday, with a grin.

CHAPTER IV.

VINON BEARDS A CAMP LION.

"GOOD-BY, boy!"

"Be careful, pard."

"I will. I know the trail, for I have tracked his horse down the mountain, and he must have the old chart."

It was an hour after the events of the last chapter, and Dandy Nugget and Golliday stood in the shadows of the last shanties of No-Luck Camp, with the dark mountains before them.

"You will come back with him?"

"If he ever comes back," answered the giant. "I know what may happen, but, if I can help it, not a drop of blood shall be shed where he is likely to be found. The time has not come for that, you know. My crusade says: 'No blood till we have all the threads in our hands! That's the motto, boy."

The young ferret nodded and dropped the hand he held.

He held it as long as he seemed to have a right to it, and saw its owner fall back.

Golliday walked over to his horse and mounted.

He turned round to take a farewell look at the slight figure standing where he had left the boy, and said half aloud to himself:

"Heaven keep him safe till I come back. I leave him in a web of death, but he is cool and won't lose his head. He wouldn't be Dandy Nugget if he did."

As for Dandy he went back to No-Luck; he re-entered the camp and walked to the Black Eagle, whose porch he crossed and proceeded to his room.

The mission of Golliday was well understood by the young shadower of the gold hills.

The Crusader had started out upon what might become a dangerous trail; he had gone after Black-Handed Saul, whom he intended to track through the mazes of his mission!

It was coolness pitted against coolness and

cunning, and the man who lost his head might fail.

Dandy Nugget could lie at his window which overlooked the sloping roof of the porch and listen to the men who sat and smoked there.

Very often they did this far into the night, and daylight sometimes found them asleep in the rough chairs.

Across the Square fell the light which, through the night, fell from the open door of the Black Eagle.

Here and there stood a tree which had been left by the founders of No-Luck, and their shadows fell athwart the ground dark and forbidding.

Dandy Nugget went to this window and sat down.

He could smell the smoke of the begrimed pipes used by the men below, and now and then could catch a word or two.

The bed in the room was a rough affair, large enough for one, and not very soft.

In fact it was not inviting enough for Dandy, who preferred to remain at the window, and as the moments passed he listened with keenness, trying to catch the trend of the remarks being made below.

One by one the men of No-Luck withdrew.

The Boy Shadow saw their forms steal across the Plaza and vanish beyond the trees.

At last no one seemed to be on the porch—at least he heard no word of conversation and all seemed as still as death there.

He sat at the window till after midnight.

At one o'clock the light in the hotel was dimmed and the trees became less visible in the Plaza.

All at once there came across the Square, gliding forward with the movements of a wild beast, a figure which the boy saw the moment it struck the Plaza.

It zig-zagged toward the Black Eagle, timing its movements as it were to the flitting of the shadows of the boughs, and at last it was lost at the end of the porch.

Dandy Nugget looked no longer, but turned to his door.

It would resist no one.

A man might throw himself against it and it would fall in with a crash, and, from what he had seen of the gliding form, he knew that it would be no match for it.

But no feet came up the stairs.

The young detective, watching the door in the dim light of the stars, waited for the man who did not come.

"He won't come," said Dandy to himself. "The spy has seen enough for to-night and has gone away. He may have been wanting to discover if Golliday is here, for spy he was as he moved from shadow to shadow in the Square."

Dandy Nugget was about to turn again to the window when he heard a voice that startled him.

It came from below and he was at the window in a trice.

"Where are all the rest of them?" demanded the voice. "Are you holding the fort alone, Hank Hawk?"

"Why, it's the girl! It's Vinon!"

"I am Vinon," was the reply. "Where are the rest of the crowd?"

"It's past midnight, child."

"So it is and haven't I as much right to be out as you, Hank Hawk?"

"That depends what ye'r out for."

A moment's silence followed this last remark and Dandy Nugget wondered what the girl would say.

"I am out because I could not remain at home any longer. I would like to have met more than you here; but I will talk to you."

"Trumps is in there."

Dandy Nugget could not see the hand which was pointed toward the open door.

"Where is he?—the very man I would see," cried Vinon.

The next moment the sound of heavy boots was heard and there swaggered from the bar-room of the Black Eagle the ideal of a desperado—a large man with a dark face, well bearded, deep-set eyes of jet blackness, and great hands which looked large even for him.

He stopped in the doorway and seemed to bend forward to get a good look at the angel of No-Luck Camp.

"That's Trumps, girl. Mebbe you'd rather talk to him."

Already Vinon of No-Luck had turned upon the man in the doorway and her eyes had looked him over in a fearless manner.

This seemed to invite him, for the next moment he was leaning against one of the posts of the porch with his arms folded and his eyes fastened upon her.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I am here to denounce the murder of Paul," cried Vinon. "It is dastardly; it was cowardice, and the hand that did the deed should be made to suffer for it."

"Oh, is that all?"

"It is not all!" continued the girl. "I am here to call all men cowards who do not take a hand in ferreting out the guilty. The murderer is in No-Luck now. The red hand is sheltered by this camp; the criminal lives under a roof in No-Luck, and vengeance must strike the guilty down."

"That's all right, girl," answered the King of Trumps. "I'm sure I have no objections, but are you going to become mixed up in this affair?"

"I'm mixed up in it now."

"Oh, I begin to see," and the words were accompanied by a laugh. "She's badly mixed up in it, eh, Hank?"

"Seems so," simpered Hank Hawk.

"It was done by the Black Beads!" rung out the clear voice of Rosy Vinon. "It was the work of those fiends; they are the men who committed this deed, and why? Let that be answered by the hunters of vengeance! Let the avenging hand tell the story which those men will keep back to the very last."

"Just hear the girl! This is better than a circus, Hank! Why, she's prettier than ever, and—"

Some one sprung up suddenly, for a chair was overturned and the voice of Hank Hawk was heard:

"She's armed, Trumps. There's 'shoot' in Vinon's eye. Don't level that revolver at me, girl."

Dandy Nugget sprung to the door of his room and threw it open.

He was half-way down the stairs when a loud report seemed to stop him and he stood for an instant on the steps.

"Vinon has precipitated matters," rushed through his mind. "This is the very thing she should not have done."

Then he went on until he opened the door which led out into the lower room and thence to the porch itself.

But he stopped there.

The sight he saw was not so bad after all, for Tolliver Trumps held Vinon's pistol hand and was looking into her face with the fiendish grin of one of his kind.

"It didn't take much, only a lock of hair, and I kin spare a dozen," laughed Trumps, brutally. "You're foolish, girl. You can't shoot your way to the end of the skein. You've got the grit and the powder; but there it ends."

"Let her go, Trumps."

"In a minute," was the response. "You don't s'pose I'd hurt Rosy Vinon, eh? She's too pretty, but she'll tell me something before I let her slip."

"I may tell you nothing, King of Trumps!"

"We'll see," and he laughed again.

"Where did Gold Golliday go, girl?"

Vinon made no reply.

"I thought she'd keep mum," said Hank

Hawk. "Get blood out of a turnip, if you kin, Trumps."

Tolliver Trumps leaned toward Vinon and his hand seemed to sink into her flesh.

"You will tell me, girl, or you will be held here till daylight!" he exclaimed.

"How would you like that?"

"You can hold me here till doomsday."

"You won't tell, eh? You won't give that wild wretch away? And the other one—the youngster who was with him to-night at your cabin? What brought him to No-Luck?"

If Dandy Nugget could have seen Vinon at that moment he would have known that his secret was safe.

"Come, I'm tired of this," cried Trumps.

"You must tell me, girl, or I'll transfer my hands from your wrists to your pretty, white throat."

"He must not do that," thought the Boy Shadow, revolver in hand, a few feet away. "That man, strong as he is, can carry this joke a little too far."

"She won't tell you, Trumps," reasserted Hank. "You don't want to hurt a girl, eh?"

"But she knows, you see. She knows what brought the boy here, and on what sort of mission Gold Golliday went to-night. It all concerns us. It means that she is in the conspiracy, and we must have her secret if it costs even her life."

"Then it will cost me my life!" heroically answered the fearless girl in the big tough's grip.

CHAPTER V.

A COOL WOMAN AND A COOL DEMAND.

"LET her go, Trumps."

Tolliver Trumps looked from Vinon to the man who gave this advice.

Hank Hawk either did not like the situation or was afraid that it might result in something against the best interests of the Black Beads of No-Luck Camp.

"You heard what she said, Hank? She won't tell anything and she knows why one left and the other stayed."

"We'll find all that out in time. It can't be kept from us you know, Trumps."

In another moment the dark hand of the ruffian had fallen from Vinon's wrist and she was free.

As the girl fell back Hank Hawk dropped his feet from the post and stood up.

Dandy Nugget saw it all.

Vinon stepped from the porch, but she still faced the men.

"It will come to light by and by," she said. "Don't think that this crime will remain concealed very long. The guilty shall be punished no matter what his station is."

Both men laughed and Tolliver Trumps pointed across the Plaza.

"You know where your nest is," cried he, "and it is time for birds like yourself to be there."

Vinon went back.

She had faced two of the toughs of No-Luck, but whether she had done her cause any real good remained to be seen.

She entered her home and threw herself upon the bed in one corner.

"I may have been too fast," she thought, "but I could not let the opportunity slip to tell these men that I intend to see the right one punished. The death of Paul shall be avenged, no matter who had a hand in it, and Golliday's crusade, whatever that is, shall not interfere."

As for Dandy Nugget he went back to the little room that looked out over the sloping roof.

Trump and Hawk were talking, but in low tones on the porch, and he could not hear what they said, and by and by they slouched across the Square and he lost them for the night.

The Boy Shadow felt that a crisis in the affairs of No-Luck was at hand.

He was confident that the coming day would see rough times and before he dropped off into a doze he tried to prepare for it.

That he was suspected he well knew. That the Black Beads believed that he had come to No-Luck for the purpose of ferreting out the hand that took young Paul's life did not admit of a single doubt, and long before the first streaks of daylight stole across the Plaza his plans had been laid.

Captain Mascot sat in his little room quite alone.

The sun had crept over the crest of the gold hills, and he had come forth to look over some papers which he had taken from a secret cupboard in the wall.

No one came to disturb him, and he went through the documents one after the other at his leisure.

He was a man past forty.

Those who seemed to know him best really knew but little about him.

The Nabob King had had a life of excitement in more than one State, and among men of all sorts.

He had gathered about him a lot of men celebrated for their coolness and their lack of mercy to any one.

Each man had a history written quite often in red, and their names had adorned the proclamations of outlawry which had been posted all over the great West.

If they now constituted the Black Beads, they preferred to keep the secret rather than advertise it.

If they had a history which included the deeds of this renowned band, they never told them on the porch of the Black Eagle, nor boasted of them elsewhere.

On this occasion Captain Mascot seemed perfectly at ease while he went through the papers.

He threw the last one aside at length and looked up.

"I've got all the threads in my hands and now must wait till Saul comes back," he said aloud, though no one heard him. "Saul will not fail, for the charts will tell him where it is, and the map will be sure to guide him to it. After that we will show our hand; then we will stand forth as we are, and woe to the man or men who attempts to interfere."

The door opened as he finished and he started a little.

He was confronted by a woman, a creature of his own age, tall and well formed, and with a face apparently tanned by the sun.

Captain Mascot stared at her a little while, and then a smile crossed his face.

"So you've dropped round again?" said he.

"Didn't I say once that I was liable to turn up almost any time? I believe I saw you last in Silver City, and here I am as large as life, but a little tired."

She advanced, still looking at the captain, and dropped into a chair at the opposite side of the table.

"Well, what is it?"

"Come, is that the way to treat me? What if I elected to make No-Luck my future home? What if I had decided to stay here till I get ready to pull up and get out?"

"You might not find life very congenial here," was the remark by which her last words were met.

"Is it worse here than at Silver City? Is this a harder place than Sandlot was?"

Captain Mascot smiled again.

"You must be judge if you stay here. We have little female society here."

"The less the better for me, perhaps," smiled the woman.

Captain Mascot's eyes fell again to the papers which he was about to tie up when his visitor came.

"Where are you stopping?" he asked.

"I shall go to the Black Eagle for the present; or, I may get board with Rosy Vinon. I believe that's her name."

The man started visibly.

The idea of this woman living with Vinon was extremely distasteful to him.

"That would be an excellent idea, wouldn't it?" she went on. "We could get along very well together, although there is a good deal of difference in our ages. She is pretty, they tell me, with some fire and dash about her—just the sort of girl I like."

"But you needn't stay with her. What's the matter with this house?"

The woman looked about her and turned to Captain Mascot with a merry twinkle in her dark eyes.

"Perhaps that wouldn't do after what has happened," she replied. "It's not quite all peace between us, you know."

"Oh, we can settle that in a moment. You wanted thirty shares in the Golden Secret?"

"I did then. I want more now."

"Forty?"

"More than that."

"Fifty?"

"More!" insatiably answered the woman.

"Jupiter!" cried Captain Mascot, turning pale. "You don't want to bankrupt me, woman?"

"Would it be less than justice if I did?" was the quick answer. "Bankrupt the man who can't number his mines on his fingers—the man who is more nabob than any one thinks? And yet you stop and turn white when I call for more than fifty shares of the Golden Secret. Come, Claude Mascot, as they call you now, you know that what I ask for is right, no matter to what heights my demands reach."

She looked across the table at him and saw his long, dark fingers play for a second with his mustache.

"You won't be satisfied with fifty shares," he said at last.

"Perhaps not," coolly replied the woman.

"Leech-like, you will return for more and more."

"Why don't you take the bull by the horns then and rid yourself of me? You have the men, and they have the cleverness to do just such things and to do them well."

He made no reply to this taunt.

"You aren't in full command here yet, but you're working in that direction. You have your hands tied a little, but you will untie them before long and No-Luck will pass into your hands."

"That's a bold charge."

"You know it is a true one. What are you here for, Captain Mascot? What mean those papers on the table? You have been looking them over and they please you—I saw that by your eye when I opened the door. They are all here—Tolliver, Saul, Hawk and Redflint. What a coterie of destroying angels. What a nice lot of human vultures with their beaks always whetted for blood."

She laughed at the end of her sentence, but the man who heard her did not even smile.

Cool and merciless as he was there was no humor in the sentence for him.

"You refuse to make over to me the shares I want?" she went on a moment later.

"You refuse to accede to this fair demand as even yourself must acknowledge."

"What do you want?"

"One hundred shares of Golden Secret."

"You would better take all."

"Hand them over, then, if your liberality goes so far."

Captain Mascot shrunk from the outstretched hand.

"You refuse, I understand?"

"It's more than half. It's a controlling interest in the best mine under ground."

"That's just what I want."

"Well?"

"If you refuse—absolutely refuse, remember I shall go and live where I please."

He seemed to know what that threat

meant, for he twisted uneasily in his chair and glared savagely at her.

Half a minute later the Nabob King had taken some other papers from a concealed niche in one of the walls and by a few strokes of the pen he made over to the strange woman one hundred shares of his best stock.

Her hands closed on the shares and as she lifted them from the table she said:

"In order to be near you in the crisis near at hand I won't quit No Luck at present."

With this she strode to the door, opened it and vanished.

In an instant Captain Mascot was upon his feet.

"Where is Tolliver?" he exclaimed. "Why did I send Black-Handed Saul away at this time?"

CHAPTER VI.

FACE TO FACE UNDER GROUND.

THE boy detective knew that he was already under the ban of the Black Beads.

He passed most of the day at the Black Eagle, coming and going whenever he liked, as if he had no fear of the band and with the utmost coolness.

He had not seen Vinon since their meeting in her house the night of Gold Golliard's departure to track Black-Handed Saul to his destination.

All No-Luck by no means belonged to Paul Paget.

The young mine king had amassed a fortune in mines and he had some whose exact location the men of No-Luck knew nothing of.

Money had filled the boy's coffers to running over; it had poured in upon him from fifty sources and he had become a young millionaire among the hills of Idaho.

No wonder he had made enemies and that he had been marked by these for destruction.

Might makes right in some places among the lawless; the strongest rule as in the jungles and the iron hand crushes whenever it can get a grip.

It was the day after Golliard's departure and the long shadows of a brief mountain twilight were stealing over the Plaza of No-Luck.

The murder of Paul Paget had ceased to form a topic for the loafers on the Eagle's porch and very few even referred to it beyond wondering perhaps to whom the boy's wealth would descend.

Detective Dandy left the hotel and stole across the street behind it.

The shadows deepened and the night came on.

If any one had followed the boy ferret he would have seen him enter the mouth of a mine half a mile from No-Luck.

It was the chief mine belonging to Paul, but at that time not the best.

The boy groped his way into the mine and felt along the wall on his right.

It was dark there and he lit no matches to show him where he was.

The bucket was hanging in the shaft and he felt of the rope by which it was lowered.

For a moment he seemed about to trust himself to the cord, but he drew back and passed on.

By and by, deeper than ever in the bowels of the earth, he reached a door which blocked his progress.

It was the door to the secret or private office of the Boy Nabob and the one from which he was returning when overtaken by death's hand.

Dandy Nugget had come to the mine—the Mountain's Heart—for a purpose.

It was not his first visit to the place, but now he was there for an object strangely his own.

The heavy door yielded to a key which

Dandy Nugget, the Boy Shadow.

Dandy Nugget took from his pocket and he shut it behind him and locked it.

Then for the first time since entering the mine, he struck a light.

He found himself in a small room with high walls and a ceiling just discernible.

It was poorly furnished, but in one corner stood a safe whose journey across the mountains had been the nine days' wonder of the far West.

It was a large safe, strong enough, as it seemed, to keep out all the rascals in Idaho, and Dandy Nugget knew that it had held Paul's wealth.

Not only gold, but papers, charts, trails and maps worth as much as the mines themselves.

He opened the tall door and by a display of strength swung it back.

The light which came from a rough deal table in the middle of the apartment showed him the interior of the safe and Dandy Nugget leaned forward with manifest curiosity.

The sight of the commingled papers seemed to fill him with excitement for he breathed hard.

After awhile he grew calm and smiled at his own excitement, then he took a lot of papers from the safe and carried them to the table.

He sat down upon the stool there and went through the documents.

He was an hour at this and then he looked through more papers, turning them over and over with an eagerness which did not for one moment abate a jot.

"They've been here. I thought so," he muttered. "The vultures have picked these bones pretty clean and they have done it well. It is not here and, in fact, not a single paper which would throw light upon the secret can I find. Black-Handed Saul has the chart; that fellow is off on the gold trail and unless Gold Golliday comes up with him he will reap the harvest."

Dandy Nugget turned for the fourth time to the safe, but the next second he stopped and looked at the door.

He had locked it, there was no doubt of this, but a key was turning in the lock.

In an instant out went the light of the Boy Shadow and he shrank against the safe and waited.

He had not come to the place unarmed.

Revolver in hand he stood in the gloom and heard the door open and shut.

Some one had entered the room, out who?

Captain Mascot, Tolliver Trumps, Hank Hawk or Redflint?

Not a sound reached the ears of the boy, while he waited in the darkness.

Why didn't the man in the treasure-room strike a light?

Dandy Nugget heard footsteps cross the stony floor, but no light revealed the face of the person.

It was enough to try nerves of iron and Dandy Nugget felt that his were being tried.

He heard a rustling among the papers in the safe, but he could see no one.

An unseen hand had come there for theft, and some one was playing a game in the dark

And what a game it was!

Dandy Nugget now and then heard a footstep, but he saw no one, though he might have put forth his hand and touched the person in the mine vault.

For ten minutes, though it seemed an hour to the Boy Shadow, the Unknown remained in the vault and then the footsteps glided back.

The iron door shut again, and he heard no more.

What sort of eyes had this mysterious visitor who could find what he wanted in the gloom of the dead boy's mine, and what had he sought, anyhow?

Dandy Nugget waited till the last sounds

had died away beyond the door, and then he sprung forward.

It was another brief display of power to open it, and in another instant he stood almost breathless in the dark and narrow corridor.

He had not relinquished the revolver which he had brought to the mine and his fingers were wound round it as before.

The intruder was just quitting the mine.

His footsteps sounded in the darkness and Dandy Nugget heard them but faintly now.

"He's coming back," suddenly passed through his mind. "The fiend, whoever he is, has forgot something, and I shall be run down."

Sure enough, the footsteps had grown suddenly more distinct and were coming toward him.

He believed that he would not have time to hide again in the mine-vault, therefore he hugged the wall and waited—it was all he could do.

On came the unseen person and an elbow brushed Dandy Nugget as he passed back into the vault.

He was there again—there for some purpose which must be a dark one, for he used no light.

The Boy Shadow of Idaho waited with bated breath. How long would the thief remain in there this time?

All at once a light flashed up behind the iron door which stood slightly ajar.

Dandy Nugget bent forward eagerly to catch a glimpse of the intruder.

One look was all he would want.

"It's not here. It has been carried off and that this very night," said a voice.

In another instant the door seemed to fly open and the light which had been snatched from the table fell upon Dandy Nugget's figure against the stone wall.

He could not escape nor did he try to.

He had been revealed in an instant and now he saw who was looking at him with eyes that seemed to have the flashes of an eagle's.

It was Captain Mascot!

In person the Nabob King, so-called, had invaded the dead boy's mine, and now he stood revealed in the guise of a robber and a plunderer.

A distorted smile crossed Captain Mascot's face as he saw the young detective against the wall.

At the same time he caught sight of the cocked revolver that hung from Dandy Nugget's hand.

He took one step forward, did Captain Mascot, his face white as ashes around his dark mustache, and then he halted.

"I thought so," said he gratingly. "I suspected you all the time."

Dandy Nugget made no reply. His look was answer enough, and the captain of the Black Beads must have seen that the boy detective was cooler than himself.

Once more the captain came down the corridor and within ten feet of Dandy Nugget he stopped and looked him over from head to feet.

"Don't you think you would better go?" he asked. "I mean quit No-Luck."

"What better right have you here than me?" was the quick reply. "You are Captain Mascot. You own nothing here beyond a few shares of stock. I hold no shares at all, but this is a free land and one has as much right to breathe its air as another."

These words coolly spoken seemed to grate harshly upon Captain Mascot's ears.

"You've robbed the safe!" he said.

"It is false! I looked at the dead boy's papers, as I have a right to do; but as for robbery I did nothing of the kind."

"You are playing spy. You are playing ferret and we don't need you here. We'll crush you like an egg-shell. Get out!"

He came toward Dandy Nugget with a bound, his figure looking very giant like in

the weird light; but all at once he stopped, for the hand of the Boy Shadow had leaped into the air and the cocked six-shooter covered him at a distance of five feet.

CHAPTER VII.

OBEYING ORDERS.

CAPTAIN MASCOT seemed to fall back from the menacing revolver of the Boy Shadow.

He had been taken somewhat unawares, although he might have expected just such a confrontation, as Dandy Nugget was a boy of clear grit.

The Captain of the Black Beads looked over the leveled weapon into the face behind it.

He knew that the finger of a cool-headed boy was at the trigger, and knowing this, he felt that his life depended on his own action.

"You will find the papers in the safe as I left them," said the young ferret. "I haven't carried off a single one, though others might explain what has become of some that cannot be found."

"Don't ask me," was the reply. "I am Captain Mascot, and you dare not bar my way from this mine."

Dandy Nugget stepped over to the wall and waved one hand down the corridor.

"You know the way out."

Captain Mascot seemed to jump at the chance of getting out, and with a glance at the boy he came forward, keeping near the opposite wall and passing Dandy Nugget without a word.

It was all over, and the man of misrule and mystery was gone.

The boy ferret saw him quit the place, and his figure was swallowed up in the night without.

"That's better than a tussle with him," thought the boy. "It is better to keep the peace even thus till Golliday comes back than to fight it out here."

He followed Captain Mascot from the mine, but not until he had given that worthy time to reach home.

He did not seem to fear a hold-up at the mouth of the treasure-place, for he walked boldly forth into the night and thence down the street to the Black Eagle.

Captain Mascot, smarting under the humiliation to which he had been subjected by Dandy Nugget, went home and dropped into the chair at his table with a grated oath.

He struck with his clinched hand a silver call-bell and looked at the door.

When it opened he looked up into the face of a slim man with a shock of red hair.

This was Redflint.

He came toward Captain Mascot with an eager face and waited for orders.

"Where's Trumps?"

"Don't know."

"And Hawk?"

"Hawk's up-stairs."

"Send for him."

Redflint bustled out, but soon returned with Hank Hawk, to whom Captain Mascot exclaimed at once:

"Hawk, this thing must not be permitted to go on another night."

"What thing, cap'n?"

"The coolness, the audacity of the boy."

A grin parted Hawk's lips.

"Oh, he's showin' off, is he?"

"Worse than that."

Both men, intensely interested, leaned forward and waited for the Nabob King to continue.

"We crush him now!" cried Mascot.

"How many does it take to do that?"

queried Redflint.

"More than you think if they lack nerve."

"But not all the Beads, eh, captain?"

"No, I hope not. He is here for mischief. This boy is in league with Golliday—"

"There's no doubt of that," broke in Hank Hawk. "While they didn't come to No-Luck at the same time, they came near enough together to settle the leagueship."

It's a partnership plain and simple, and it's against us."

Captain Mascot, very red in the face, nodded.

"What about the woman?" asked Redflint.

Mascot turned instantly to the speaker.

"The girl, you mean?"

"No, the woman—Boulder Belle. She is here—the same creature who interfered with our game in Camp Norway last summer. You had a difficulty with her, as you remember, cap'n."

"Oh, that woman! She is here, as you say, Redflint. I have seen her."

"Yes."

"You know where she is now, don't you?"

"I know," answered Hawk. "She's taken up her abode with Vinon."

There was a quick start on Captain Mascot's part, and he twisted sharply in his chair.

Boulder Belle already with Rosy Vinon?

Then she had carried out her threat; she was where he did not care to have her, and it would not have been so bad if she had joined Dandy Nugget at the Black Eagle.

For a moment the man of fate was silent, then he seemed to throw himself across the table as he looked up at his minions.

"At Vinon's, eh?" he hissed. "She threatened to go there, but I hardly thought she'd go. Yet, why not? That creature will do anything."

"Just so. She showed that last summer."

"At Vinon's?" repeated Captain Mascot. "When did you see her there, Hank?"

"Less than an hour ago."

"Closeted with the girl, eh?"

"Yes."

"The young detective first; I guess that would be the right thing. You know where he is."

"At the hotel."

"Yes, in the room over the porch. Wait till midnight. It needn't be much of a tussle. You can get up the stairs with little noise, or one of you can get across the roof."

The listening men did not reply.

"You will find the horse in the stable. You can take Dark Dick, or, if you like, you may try Natchie."

"Why the horse at all?" queried Redflint. "He might run across Gold Golliday."

"That is true," reflected Captain Mascot. "I don't want him to do that."

"I thought not. The mine would be better—not the boy's mine, but yours, Hank."

"Mine? the old trap without a loop-hole of any kind and its foul air?"

"The fouler the better!"

"The cap'n's right, Hank," grinned Redflint. "At midnight you say, cap'n?"

"Any time between that hour and morning. There must be no waiting till Golliday comes back. Now or never. The boy ferret first, then the others."

Both men bowed and were quitting the room when Captain Mascot called them back.

"This boy has been on the trail for months. I know that. He knows about the beads and the signs. He is working up the death of Paul. Don't let this escape you for a moment."

"It shall not."

"That's right. The mine will do better than the horse. Men have untied themselves, but they have never recovered from the gases of a trap like yours, Hank."

That was all; the two men were permitted to depart and Captain Mascot was alone in the little room.

He arose and walked the floor like a raging tiger.

"To think that I've got to fight for it at this stage of the game," he growled. "To think that I've got to battle for my very existence just at this time! It is the last fight.

It is the last struggle for more than ten millions."

He went back to the table and sat down.

Meantime Hank Hawk and Redflint had left the house. They walked together through the shadows of No-Luck, and turned into a shanty near the end of the straggling street.

There Redflint struck a light and looked at his companion.

They stood face to face a moment in silence, and the candle, flickering on the stand, cast their rough shadows on the wall.

"It's the captain's last fight and he knows it," remarked Hank Hawk. "It is the death-blow to one or both of them."

"It is nothing less, Hawk. More than this: if he loses we all lose."

"That is true. This crusade about which Golliday talks so much—you know what it is. Dandy Nugget first. For my part if Golliday was here I would say him first."

"But the boy now and Golliday when he comes back."

"Then comes the woman."

"Boulder Belle comes back at the wrong stage of the game for us. You remember the night she appeared to us in Shasta City and pronounced that curse which was, in substance, that when she met us again the play should end? I see her now as she appeared then—cool and collected with Captain Mascot wounded on the ground and the Vigilantes of Shasta preparing to finish all of us in the canyon. I don't like this woman with the cool nerves and the piercing eye. It is like the coming back of a cyclone that has passed."

The night wore on; No-Luck grew more and more quiet as the hours waned and at last there slipped from Hawk's cabin the angels of destruction.

It was not the first mission of death. They had carried out Captain Mascot's behests before; they had never faltered when summoned to kill, and this time they never questioned their perfect right to strike.

As if some hand had paved the way the porch of the Black Eagle was deserted.

The last loafer had deserted it and the light in the hotel was dim and uncertain.

Hank Hawk and Redflint glided toward the building and halted within its shadow.

From the nearest mountain came a long dismal howling where the wolves were congregating in the weird passes, but that was all the sound they heard.

Headed by Hawk whose broad shoulders looked Atlantean in the light, the pair crept across the floor to the stair door.

It had no lock and opened readily.

Up the steps went the desperadoes one after the other, stopping now and then to listen in the gloom.

They reached the door and Hank looked back at Redflint. The Black Beads were near their victim.

The hand of Hawk found the latch; he pressed it sharply and the next moment they sprang across the threshold to rush toward a figure that rose on a couch across the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RETURN OF THE CRUSADER.

It was like the rush of a storm.

Detective Dandy might have dropped the foremost man whom he saw between him and the window, but he did not.

Both men fell upon him at once and he was in the grasp of the Black Beads.

"So you have caught the young hawk?" laughed Redflint, as he held the boy down and looked into his surprised face.

"That's what we've done, but don't wait. You know what the orders were?"

Redflint nodded.

Dandy Nugget was bound in a trice; the big hands that performed the operation were not nice about it, and in a moment, as it seemed, the Boy Shadow of Idaho stood in

the middle of the room helpless and in the hands of merciless men.

He asked no questions? Why should he? He knew.

Hank Hawk went down-stairs first as if to see that the coast was clear.

When a low whistle came up, Redflint turned to the boy and escorted him across the room.

Down through the Black Eagle to the street and across it to the denser shadows that lay all the way to the mines at the edge of No-Luck Camp!

During all this trip no questions and no lies. The boy prisoner communed with himself, but looked at the men who had him in charge.

"This way," said Hank Hawk, to his companion at a tree and they filed to the left.

For the first time Dandy Nugget seemed to draw back in protest.

It appeared to dawn upon him whether he was being taken, for he gave his captors a sharp, inquisitive look and then looked down the narrow path.

"You'll see in a little while," said Hank, at the boy's ear. "You needn't ask any question, I guess."

No, he would not, and keeping silent, he was taken over the trail deeper than ever among the shadows until they came to the mouth of an old mine.

The mountains were honeycombed with failures. Old mines yawned everywhere with their deserted flumes, their ghostly shafts and their foul chambers.

Men had worked them awhile to look elsewhere for the new Eldorado, and not a few had been abandoned because their owners had added to the silent numbers in the mountain cemetery.

This mine was Hank's "trap."

It had been rightly called by Captain Mascot "a death-trap under ground."

Hank had gained it at the gaming-table, and it had cost him nothing beyond a false play with marked cards.

A failure when he won it, it was no better now.

He had never mined an ounce of gold in it, and never would. It was a foul place where human life could not be sustained a moment, so it was said, and where darkness ruled supreme and silence held sway.

The Black Beads halted at the mouth of the mine.

The hand of Redflint rested heavily on Dandy Nugget's shoulder, and for a moment he looked down into the up-turned face with a show of pity.

"You know where you are, boy?" he said.

"I am at the mouth of a mine."

"You are at Hank's trap. This is the old Haunted Placer where Captain Tebbs died."

There was no reply.

"Come," cried the impatient Hawk. "What's the use of waiting here? It's ag'in' orders, Redflint. Take him down!"

There was no drawing back now. Dandy Nugget merely looked at the stern faces and seemed to take new resolution.

"You're never coming out of this place, boy. This is the end of your spying."

"It is the beginning of the end for you."

"What's that—the beginnin' of the end for us, eh?" cried Hawk. "I can't see it that way."

"Wait and see!"

"Take him in! It's all buncombe," cried Redflint. "Here goes. I will hold him as long as possible."

"You have the ropes?"

Redflint produced a lasso from beneath his coat and proceeded to fasten it beneath Detective Dandy's arms, after which he was blindfolded and led on.

Without the handkerchief the darkness would have been intense; wish it was more so, and thus the daring Boy Shadow went

down into Hank Hawk's "trap," down, down to death.

Half an hour later Hawk appeared suddenly to Captain Mascot.

He burst in upon the captain and Tolliver Trumps and startled them not a little.

It was past one in the morning.

"Well, what did you do?" inquired Captain Mascot, his face showing the interest he took in what might fall from Hawk's tongue.

"He's there."

"In your trap?"

"We left him there at any rate."

"No one saw you?"

"We didn't play our hand to be seen," was the answer. "We went and took him, that's all."

"Did he fight?"

"Fight? He had no chance. We were upon him in a flash and he was in our clutches before he could say Jack Robinson. He was in bed."

"And asleep?"

"Yes, but the opening of the door awoke him, and we were at the bed before he could lift a hand. He went with us as mute as a lamb and he's there now."

Captain Mascot looked at Tolliver Trumps.

"I told you they'd do it," he exclaimed. "That's one. You know what the trap is, Tolliver?"

The big man nodded.

"We let him down with the lasso and blindfolded him besides; that's making it certain, you see. There's no getting out for the Boy Shadow and it's a good night's work."

"It looks good," said Captain Mascot. "Now, when Gold Golliday comes back—"

Just then a wild yell was heard and the thunderous beat of hoofs in the street beyond.

All three looked toward the door and Tolliver Trumps opened it and listened.

The night was clear and still; sounds could be heard at a great distance, and while the three men listened the same yell was repeated with more clearness than before.

It was a quick and startled look that Captain Mascot sent toward his companions.

"Golliday is back!" said he.

Trumps nodded and Hank Hawk listened on.

Down the street came the steed which as yet they could not see; but all were at the door now with their gaze fastened upon the Square which could be seen in the light from the Black Eagle.

A horse had halted there; they could see a grotesque figure in the saddle and all knew that it was Golliday in his red shirt.

Yes, the old Crusader, the enemy of the Black Beads, had come back sooner than expected.

Captain Mascot watched the man, who seemed with his horse to have grown into a statue in ebony in the light, and at last he turned to his men.

"What a target!" was all he said.

Tolliver Trumps sprung across the room and snatched a Winchester from the wall.

Both Captain Mascot and Hawk drew back and let Trumps stride to the open door.

The bronzed hands of the big desperado of No-Luck gripped the weapon with resolution and those who watched him seemed to hold their breath.

Tolliver Trumps threw the rifle to his shoulder and his cheek dropped to the stock. "Through the head if you can," whispered Mascot.

There was no reply, none but the firmer grip of the dark hands at the Winchester, and perhaps the glitter of the eye that remained open.

"Why don't ye shoot?" asked Hawk at last impatiently. "He'll vanish d'rectly."

"Yes, now or never!" put in Captain Mascot.

This was enough. The next instant the report of the Winchester broke the silence of

that fateful night, and Tolliver Trumps uttered a fierce oath.

The man was there still, apparently untouched.

Had he missed him?

Had he fired point-blank at Gold Golliday, the giant, only to shoot wide of the mark?

"You missed!" cried Hank Hawk, tearing at the rifle. "Give it to me. I'll show you how to shoot."

The King of Trumps threw the weapon away and whipped out a revolver to step to the door, ready to try again with the newer weapon.

That moment the man on the Plaza moved. He seemed to turn his steed toward the house, and all three saw his dark face and shaggy beard.

"A miss is as good as a mile, gentlemen," he laughed as he rode slowly forward. "You can't hit a barn door at ten paces. You shoot like a drunken digger."

This taunt went deeper than the skin of those who heard it.

He came on fearlessly, his figure showing no longer in the light, for he had left the Plaza, but they could see it underneath the morning stars, still an excellent target for the marksmen of No-Luck.

Yet they stood irresolute in the doorway of Captain Mascot's house.

Golliday had taken off his hat, and was sweeping it before him in token of defiance.

"I'm squaring up the books, and you had best take your inning now if ever, gentlemen," cried he. "You won't get as good a chance to-morrow nor next day, p'raps. I'm on my crusade and you ought to know what that means. Remember Buzzard Canyon and its Mazeppa!"

"I knew it!" grated Captain Mascot. "I told you so all the time, and now that man proclaims it boldly."

He sprung from the doorway with a revolver in his hand, and the weapon went up the instant he struck the street.

But the target vanished before he could fire; yes, with the quickness of thought, Gold Golliday wheeled his horse and was almost across the Plaza.

Captain Mascot dropped the weapon with a grated curse.

CHAPTER IX.

SUDDEN WEALTH.

It was true that Boulder Belle had sought and found Vinon in the latter's home.

When she did this she arrayed herself against Captain Mascot, and that worthy seemed to take it as a declaration of war.

They had never met before, and Vinon wondered why that tall, dark-faced woman had come to her.

Boulder Belle said nothing about herself until she had fairly secured an asylum in the girl's house.

Vinon asked her nothing, but seemed to understand that she had come to No-Luck for a purpose, and so she let her have her way.

It was the night of Dandy Nugget's capture by the Black Beads that the woman unb burdened herself.

She and Vinon had sat a long time among the shadows of the little room, and the streets of No-Luck seemed deserted and quiet.

The girl waif of the camp had watched the woman some time in silence, wondering as she had done before what was behind her visit to No-Luck when Boulder Belle, turning suddenly upon her, said:

"You drifted in here, did you, girl?"

Vinon smiled, sadly.

"I drifted in," she echoed. "I came in on a storm, and she who came with me sleeps over yonder on the mountain-side, buried by the roughs of No Luck."

"Did he help?"

"Captain Mascot?"

"Ah, you were thinking of him, were you? Yes, did he help bury her?"

"He wasn't here then."

"I might have known that," said Boulder Belle with a smile. "He did not come till afterward; that is true."

The woman was silent for a moment.

"Girl," she suddenly resumed, bending toward Vinon, whom she watched curiously, "you have been wondering what brought me here. I can see that in your face. You should know—in part."

She went to the window and looked out. She saw the lights of the Black Eagle, and the figures that crossed the Plaza.

She watched these a few moments, and then came back to the girl waif.

"There are secrets which should be kept by their possessors," she went on. "I am called Boulder Belle, of Bismarck, but I haven't inhabited that city for years."

"Long ago I had a right to that name, but now I might wear another just as well."

"Captain Mascot has not always been Captain Mascot."

"The man who would rule here with a hand of iron once was a hunted outlaw with a price upon his head and with men at his heels."

"Accursed for his evil deeds and hunted up and down the canyons of the far Southwest he was driven from pillar to post until one night we caught him."

Vinon started at the pronoun and looked at the woman.

"You smile," said Boulder Belle. "I was there when they had him in the snare from which there seemed no escape whatever. This man, justly outlawed for his crimes, was fairly taken, and by the red nomads of the plains."

"I led them to the trail—I, not Boulder Belle then, but Violet of Violet City."

"Does the name startle you, girl?"

Vinon's face had taken on a new expression, one of intense curiosity, and she seemed to be leaning toward Boulder Belle whom she was watching with an intensity born of mingled fear and suspense.

"I have heard of Violet City," said the girl. "I have heard of some of its people."

"You have? Of whom have you heard?" and the hand of Boulder Belle fell upon the girl's wrist and fastened there.

"Let me think," continued Vinon. "You remember that I drifted into No-Luck?"

"Yes, yes."

"It was long ago and I was a mere child then. I recollect the wagon and the storm in the mountain."

"But what makes you remember the name of Violet City?"

"I will show you."

Vinon crossed the room and bent over the little couch where she slept.

Boulder Belle of Bismarck saw her run one hand beneath the pillow and a moment later she came back with something in it.

"It is by this," said she; "I have kept this all through the years that have followed my drifting in."

She placed a little packet in Boulder Belle's lap and that person took it up with a slight excited tremor.

Her hands proceeded to undo it by taking off the buckskin covering and all at once she looked up with a cry:

"Did this come in with you—girl?" she exclaimed.

"It did. Janus Jack, the man to whom more than any others I owed my life, found it in the wagon and kept it from me until a few days before he died when he restored it. It is a locket and a picture and you will see scratched underneath the face the name 'Violet City.'"

Boulder Belle looked a moment and then replied.

"I see, I see! It is not very plain, as if the name had been scratched by a feeble hand, but still it is there. Was the woman whom they found dead in the wagon like the one in this picture?"

"I have a recollection that she was."

"And they named you, Vinon, did they?"

"They gave me that name for want of a better," smiled the girl-waif. "I think it was Janus Jack's suggestion, and the others fell in with it. It will do as good as any other, don't you think?"

There was no answer for a minute.

"Let this pass," said the woman at last as her hands closed about the picture reverently. "I will resume now."

"Captain Mascot, as I have intimated, reached the end of his string in the far Southwest.

"Caught by a lot of red-skins whom I had guided to his secret camp, he found himself in a veritable net of death.

"There was no escape.

"He felt that his days were near their ending, and that he was looking at the sun for the last time.

"Why did I hate this man so as to track him up and down the land? Time will tell, girl.

"Well, they lashed him to the back of the wildest steed in the band—lashed him there with cords that gave not, and with sinews that the sun would draw as tight as iron bands.

"It was a living death, but the wretch deserved it all.

"He looked into my face with a mute appeal for help, but I withheld my hand. It was not to help that villain; I had registered on high an oath which kept me from pitying the guilty wretch.

"Away went the wild horse, headed for the barren cactus lands further South, and we thought we had seen the last of Captain Mascot until, perhaps, we should run across his bones bleaching in the sun.

"It was a vengeance which was as just as it was terrible.

"Hated by red and white alike, this man had met the most righteous fate that could be meted out to an outlaw, and I went back with the Indians feeling that I had seen the last of the hunted scoundrel of the Southwest.

"Years passed, and I had almost forgotten Captain Mascot.

"I went back to Violet City, sold my little belongings there, and turned my face in another direction.

"I had settled old scores with my old foe; I had seen him riding toward the cactus plains lashed to the back of a horse that would bear him on and on until he should fall exhausted in the broiling sun that scorches and kills.

"But it was not to be thus.

"Imagine if you can, girl, my feelings when, entering a certain gold camp miles from here, and years after Captain Mascot's ride, I again came face to face with him.

"Changed he was, but I knew him.

"He was king there, the nabob of a lot of desperate men, and the Czar of the mountain camp.

"Heaven and Captain Mascot kept the secret of his escape.

"I did not seek to question him, nor do I know to this day how he avoided the death to which we sent him.

"Did he know me when we came face to face? In an instant!

"Time had not changed me very much, and he knew me the moment he set eyes upon me.

"Yes, Captain Mascot knew that Violet had found him and that she knew that he had escaped from the wild Mazeppa ride across the waterless plains."

Boulder Belle paused a moment and gazed at the daguerreotype she held in her hands.

"From that day to this I haven't lost sight of that man. Last summer I gave him ample evidence of this and he discovered then that while I live life will be made miserable to him."

"But he may turn on you," said Vinon.

"He has about him desperate men—so desperate perhaps as those whom he was with when rediscovered."

"They are the same men," exclaimed Boulder Belle. "There are Redflint, Hank Hawk, Black-Handed Saul and Tolliver Trumps."

"You know them all."

"Why shouldn't I?" asked Boulder Belle, with a flush and a smile. "It is my business to know every one. Here, look at this," and she drew from her bosom a package of papers which she placed on Vinon's table.

The waif of No-Luck looked at them a moment and then turned to the woman.

"One hundred shares in the Golden Secret," Boulder Belle went on. "Signed up and all in shape. He handed them over since my coming to No-Luck."

"Not Captain Mascot?" cried Vinon, with a start.

"Captain Mascot, the man with ten names. Here is a place for the transfer—two places, in fact, though he never expected to see one of the blanks filled. Have you pen and ink, girl?"

"We have no need of such things here," was the reply. "I have nothing but the stub of a pencil which was found in the wagon."

"Let me have it."

Vinon complied and Boulder Belle opened the packet and laid one of the shares on the table.

There were three papers calling in the aggregate for one hundred shares in the Nabob King's boss mine.

The strange woman wrote a few moments, and then pushed the sheets toward the astonished girl.

"They're yours," she said. "You are Captain Mascot's partner."

"I?" cried Vinon. "I cannot take these."

"But you must. I don't want them and you shall have every one. I give them freely, and, besides, you must be paid for that dread drifting in, in the storm. Captain Mascot's partner! I wonder what he will say when he hears of it?" and Boulder Belle fell back in her chair and laughed.

CHAPTER X.

SUDDENLY BALKED.

It was like a dream to Vinon of No-Luck City.

She reached out for the shares, but instantly drew back again.

She felt that she could not touch them, that she really had no right to the wealth which had been thrust upon her, for she had heard of the fabulous yield of the famous mine and she did not know by what means Boulder Belle had acquired the shares.

"You don't want to take them?" said the woman. "You refuse, do you?"

"I—I—"

"Oh, I shall never need them," and snatching up the papers Boulder Belle forced them upon the fair waif. "They are yours, and when it comes to business you can outvote him. Just think of it. You can outvote Captain Mascot!"

Vinon tried to smile, but felt that it was a failure.

"I took them from him fairly," continued Boulder Belle. "I took them because I was the stronger. He gave them up not with a very good grace, of course, but they were given up all the same. They're not artistically engraved, but they represent more real wealth than one-half the beautiful certificates they have in the great cities. Yours? Certainly. Hold on to them, girl. Time will come when you may need them every one."

Thus forced to take what had been made over to her, Vinon of No-Luck took possession of the shares and laid them away.

"I am not going away from camp," said

Boulder Belle, interpreting Vinon's inquisitive glance. "I am here for work and you have just witnessed some of it in the transfer of the mine shares."

"This man is powerful here. You have heard of the Black Beads?"

The girl's start was answer enough.

"That Order came into being after the ride over the cactus plain. It grew out of that ride, for Captain Mascot saw that he had to have about him men as desperate as himself and as cool.

"The Black Beads are cruel and cunning."

"They strike in the dark and, as a rule, no one ever knows when the blow is to fall nor where."

Vinon thought of the shining bead which Dandy Nugget had exhibited to her and Golliiday.

"The beads on the arm is the sign of the Order," continued Boulder Belle. "Thirty-nine beads on a string which encircles the left arm above the elbow.

"I have seen them on a dead arm, but on one only. There was at one time belonging to the band one Kingly Kit, desperate, but a little over cunning."

"He died in the Southwest and I saw his arm bared in the Plaza and the beads taken off."

"Rest assured that they are to be found on the arms of the rest of the band. The loss of a bead means death of the loser."

"Dark as their code is, it must be carried out to the letter."

"But," queried Vinon eagerly, "the loss of one bead would be difficult to discover."

"Perhaps," smiled Boulder Belle. "The beads would have to be counted, and with the bracelet out of sight and on the arm of the owner, I admit that that would not be an easy job."

Then Vinon told the full story of Paul's death, as it was known to her.

The woman listened eagerly, now and then seeming ready to question her but abstaining until the story had been told.

"So Dandy Nugget found one bead on the ground where Golliiday discovered the boy?"

"He found one black bead."

"The loss of it would condemn the murderer even by the terrible code of the Order; but it would have to be proven."

"Dandy Nugget will do that."

"I must see the bead," cried Boulder Belle. "I will see it now."

It was past midnight, and Vinon looked at the woman with a start.

"He is asleep now," said she. "He has retired to his little quarters in the Black Eagle—"

"But I will find his door," put in the woman. "I must see that bead before I sleep."

She rose and bade Vinon good-night.

Just outside the door she paused and looked back at the little house.

A singular look came into her eyes and she seemed to breathe hard for a moment.

"If it is true, then I have a right to strike down these men one by one," she murmured.

"If what I more than half believe be true, I have a right to rid the earth of the Black Beads of No-Luck."

She started off toward the Black Eagle, gliding through the shadows of the gold camp and at last stopped close to the hotel.

Boulder Belle knew where to go.

If she had never been there before she seemed to know that by crossing the porch she could enter the room leading to the stairs and thence to the door of Dandy Nugget's chamber.

She reached the little door and knocked.

There was no response.

Waiting a moment, the woman knocked again, but with the same result.

No one asked her to enter and at last she turned the knob.

The door yielded readily, and Boulder Belle stepped into the room.

A streak of late moonlight had fallen across the floor and touched the bed.

No light was needed to tell the woman that the couch was without a tenant.

The female avenger crossed the apartment and bent over the bed.

It had been disturbed, but it had no one in it then.

"He has been here," said Boulder Belle. "The boy ferret has been here to-night, but he has gone away."

She had come too late.

She stood in the middle of the room some time, wondering what might have become of the young ferret, and no one came up to disturb her.

"To-morrow. It must be so," she said to herself. "He will keep the bead which is the clue. He won't surrender that. I must wait till to-morrow."

She retraced her steps and passed from the hotel.

No one saw her, and she went nearly back to Vinon's home before she halted.

Suddenly there came into view two figures that crept down the street, avoiding the light spots as if their mission was none of the best.

Instantly Boulder Belle shrunk into the shadow of a shanty and watched them.

On they came, two giants in stature, side by side in their dark shirts and with pantherish tread.

They came from toward the mines, and they passed on toward Captain Mascot's house.

"Two of the destroying angels!" ejaculated Boulder Belle while she watched the pair. "What has been their mission, and did the Boy Shadow quit his bed to watch them? Hank and Redflint! I know them all, and in my book of vengeance all have been marked."

The two forms passed out of sight, and at last the woman went on to Vinon's home.

She opened the door noiselessly and slipped in.

The tired girl had fallen asleep on the couch, and Boulder Belle, picking the lamp from the table, held it over the placid face.

"So like her," she muttered. "I might have noticed the resemblance in time, but the picture has helped it. Drifted in? Don't I know how they took them away that cold night, and how the snow hid the wagon tracks till we had to give up the hunt? Drifted in! And I have enriched her. Just what I should have done, and with that man's wealth, too."

Boulder Belle replaced the lamp and fell to watching Vinon in her sleep.

There was no room on the couch for two, and the woman took the chair near the table and watched on.

The moon went down and the shanty became full of darkness.

The woman's head fell forward on the table and she buried it in her arms.

Daylight was near at hand when she started and sprung erect.

If she had not heard anything she must have been roused by a dream, for she looked at the couch in the corner and smiled when she saw that it was still tenanted by Vinon.

"I heard a noise," she said. "It was not a dream. I heard it too distinctly. It might have been the girl."

She was half-way toward Vinon when she stopped and turned suddenly toward the portal.

It was at the door, sure enough.

Alongside the door was a window with three panes, and it gave light enough for Vinon in the camp home.

Boulder Belle went over to this window and stopped there.

She was in time to see an arm withdrawn, a dark arm, shielded in part by a miner's shirt, and the next moment the door opened.

Boulder Belle fell back, and something

came from her pocket and was lifted in a jiffy.

The door opened a little further and the head of a man was thrust inside.

The woman who saw all this did not stir.

Clutching the revolver with the grip of a cool head, she seemed to lean toward the door, while she must have held her breath.

In another moment the man was inside.

His burly figure visible between Boulder Belle and the morning stars showed her a long beard and a well-knit stature.

He was there for no good.

All at once, and just as the man stepped toward the couch where the girl slept, the left hand of the tigress on the watch, fell upon his arm, and he fell back with a cry.

"I am here," said the woman through shut teeth. "I am on the alert, King of Trumps. What is here you can't take except over the dead body of Violet, of Violet City! Go tell your master that what I have secured shall be defended with life itself."

He did not speak, but suddenly jerked his arm loose while he seemed to throw his body over the step.

"I am domiciled in this house," Boulder Belle went on, following him into the night air. "We are two against you and your band, but there is death where I am to be found—death to the men who wear the beads of secrecy and crime."

He looked over the hand of Boulder Belle into a face which emphasized by its stern expression every word she spoke.

"Go and tell him that you failed to rob us," the woman resumed. "If it is to be war to the knife let it be so. Captain Mascot is poorer than he was at sundown, and another person is richer than ever she dreamed of. Go tell your beaded master so."

Boulder Belle went back into the shanty, coolly shutting the door in the man's face.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EDGE OF THE STORM-CLOUD.

"WELL, where are the shares?"

The speaker was Captain Mascot and he looked at Tolliver Trumps as that worthy entered his house just as day was breaking over No-Luck Camp.

Tolliver Trumps smiled, but it was more of a wolfish grin than an expression of merriment.

It was evident that the man had failed of his mission.

He held out his hands toward Captain Mascot.

"I'd have 'em here if I got 'em, eh, cap'n?" he said. "Fact is, I couldn't find them at all."

"You found her, eh?"

"I found the shanty."

"And not the woman?"

Tolliver shook his head.

"She has them with her, I guess."

"Perhaps."

Tolliver was not the man to confess that a woman had beaten him off.

He could not look his master in the face with all his boasted bravery and say that Boulder Belle had outwitted him.

That was a little too much.

Captain Mascot grew sullen and silent and Tolliver waited for his next sentence.

"What about the man you shot last night?" he suddenly inquired.

"I haven't seen him since."

"Golliday must feel our hand and that before he gets second wind. This man says he is near the end of his crusade and we must anticipate him."

"I told the boys so."

"You know where he stays while in No-Luck?"

"In Janus Jack's shanty. It was given to him by Jack before he died and Golliday inhabits it."

He may try to play his game right off," continued Captain Mascot.

"He will look for his young pard first."

"He may do that. The boy is safe enough, and if Redflint and Hank did their duty he will never see the sun again."

"Hank's trap is a trap sure enough. Captain Tebbs died there you know."

The Nabob King nodded and his brow cleared a moment.

"I want those papers—those shares she forced from me," he went on. "They comprise the controlling stock in the Golden Secret."

"Couldn't you have avoided giving them up?"

"I might have refused point blank, but I relied on getting them back either by stratagem or open force. You could not find them, you say? This shows that she guards them well. Is she really with the girl Vinon?"

"Both are in the same nest."

"So I have heard."

Five minutes later the giant form of Tolliver might have been seen moving toward the Black Eagle.

Already its porch held some of its usual patrons, and dark shirts and bronzed faces were to be seen above its boards.

Tolliver caught the eye of a man near the end of the porch as he stepped upon it, and this person followed him into the hotel proper.

It was Hank Hawk.

"He wasn't teched last night," said Hawk, plucking Tolliver's sleeve. "You missed him as clean as a whistle."

Tolliver Trumps bit his lip and looked down at the floor.

"It seems impossible, doesn't it Hank?" said he.

"Looks that way, 'pon my life. Shot at at forty yards and missed clean; and a man with his figger, too. The gun was loaded, eh, Tolliver?"

"Of course. The cap'n wouldn't keep an empty Winchester in the house you ought to know."

In another instant a voice that seemed to startle both men was heard outside, and they turned to see beyond the open door the stalwart figure of Gold Golliday.

There was the usual twinkle in the strange man's eyes and he ran his hand through his beard as he strode toward the porch.

To liver Trumps looked at Hawk and their eyes seemed to speak.

"Keep cool," said Tolliver. "No open racket with this fast head here. No uncovering of our plans till we're ready to throw off the cloth."

They went slowly to the door and stopped there.

At the same moment Gold Golliday reached the porch.

He swept its tenants with a glance, and then leaned against one of the posts and quietly folded his arms.

"Who wants ter buy fifty shares in Silver Water?" cried he, again taking in the crowd.

No one spoke.

"Fifty shares in Silver Water ought ter be worth bidding high for," he went on. "I've got 'em here, and what's more, I'll give the buyer a straight tip to the mine."

"What do you want for the shares?" said some one near the end of the porch.

"More than you kin pay, Yankee Sims. A good deal more than any man in my hearing can show up in solid cash. There's only one man in No-Luck what has the cash on hand."

A laugh went up at Yankee Sims's expense, and that worthy frowned.

"Don't want ter buy, eh?" cried Golliday.

"Maybe you think I can't give the buyer a good deed." He was looking at Tolliver and Hank now. "Don't fool yerself on that score. I have the deed here."

His dark hand vanished inside his bosom and he drew forth an object at sight of which the men in the doorway started.

It was a piece of parchment, a bit longer than one's hand, and bearing evidences of age and much folding.

"What say ye now?"

The hands of Tolliver shut madly and he glanced at his partner.

"He's robbed Saul!" he whispered.

Hank's response was a little nod, but it was enough. He understood.

"No buy in this crowd. Reckon I'll try the captain himself."

Golliday turned toward the edge of the porch and Tolliver clutched Hank's arm.

"If he tries that it winds up some one's career," he hissed.

The crowd looked at Golliday with varying remarks and his big figure was seen slouching across the Square like one certain that his star was in the ascendant.

"Quick! to the cap'n's," said Tolliver. "By the short way back of the Plaza."

The two men fell back and vanished through the rear of the Black Eagle.

They covered the distance to the nabob's house in three minutes and rushed through to the captain's favorite room.

"The fool is coming to sell fifty shares of Silver Water," they exclaimed.

The Nabob King's look became a stolid stare.

"No, he couldn't do that unless—"

"Well, he's found and plundered Saul," was the interruption. "He has the chart and you know he couldn't get it from no one but Saul himself."

"That is true. And he is coming here?"

"He said so at the Eagle."

Captain Mascot with the look of a fiend in his eyes went to the window and looked out.

He saw no one.

The morning had broken bright and beautiful over No-Luck Camp, and a light wind stirred the trees scattered over the Square.

Golliday was not in sight.

"Tell me about the offer," said Mascot, coming back to his companions.

The King of Trumps did so, briefly as if there was no time to lose.

"Let him come!" cried Captain Mascot defiantly, "I will wait for him here."

He laid a cocked revolver on the table before him and looked toward the closed door.

Minute chased minute and ten fled, but no Gold Golliday.

He seemed to be very slow, or to have abandoned his threat.

"He won't come," said Mascot. "This man has shown the white feather."

"I don't know. He looked cool and defiant at the hotel, and he certainly started thither."

"But he has backed out."

It was evident that Tolliver Trumps did not regret Golliday's non-appearance.

Perhaps he did not care to face the man at whom he had fired point-blank.

"Go out and see where he is," commanded Mascot at last. "We must settle scores with him now or never. He has found and robbed Saul. He has killed the right-hand man of your leader."

"Saul certainly didn't surrender the chart while life lasted," remarked Hank.

"Saul of the Black Hand is dead!" answered Captain Mascot, solemnly.

Left alone by the departure of his henchmen, Captain Mascot looked at his revolver and frowned.

Out in No-Luck all was quiet.

In a shanty near the end of the street stood a man with his arms folded listening to a woman who had been talking for five minutes.

Golliday had found Boulder Belle instead of Captain Mascot.

She had just finished the story of her ad-

venture at the Black Eagle, the empty couch and the gliding figures on the street, and the man who had listened was silent but interested.

"Hawk and Redflint, eh?" he said.

"Hawk and Redflint."

"I know where the boy is!"

"You know?" cried Vinon, who had heard all. "Do you think he fell into their hands last night?"

"They have surprised him. They made a swoop while I was on my way back. The boy is in the trap!"

"And where is the trap?"

"Where the famous Tebbs died. Deep in the bowels of the earth where life can't be sustained a minute if all stories are not false. He is there."

Vinon at thought of this clasped her hands, and the face of Boulder Belle lost color.

"It is too late now," said the girl.

"It is never too late for vengeance!" was the answer.

CHAPTER XII.

A FULL STRAND OF BLACK BEADS.

It was not very far to the mouth of the old mine.

The fate of the renowned Captain Tebbs the founder of No-Luck was one of the stock stories of the region.

This man, celebrated for his coolness, had met his fate in the heart of his own mine, some said on account of foul air and others by the hand of a secret foe.

True it was that he had been found dead in the mine, years before the opening of our story, and beyond this the mystery had never gone.

Gold Golliday, with the nerve of a man tried and tested, quitted Vinon's home.

His face had changed color and his eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire.

He took no roundabout trail to the old trap, but went as straight to it as a crow would fly.

If he feared foul air he showed it not by any outward sign; if he dreaded a descent into the dark depths of Hank's trap he let no one know.

At the mouth of the old trap he paused.

He seemed to have been there before for all at once he passed the threshold of the place and vanished.

Gold Golliday was intent on finding out what had become of the Boy Shadow of Idaho.

In a little while he was groping his way down through the long chambers of the old place.

Bad air there was in profusion, but he did not seem to heed it.

Here he stooped and crawled and there he walked erect with a ceiling so high above him that he could not touch it with his hands.

"This is a trap sure enough," muttered Golliday in the darkness. "It's as bad as Tartarus with the lights out. Where am I? Oh, yes; here's the line on the wall and here's the triad which says 'turn to the right.'"

That man certainly knew where he was in the gloom.

Hands were as good as eyes to him and his nerve was not deserting him.

He turned to the right and went on.

Now the path seemed to bear him downward into the very center of the earth and now he was walking on a level.

At last he seemed to have gone far enough.

As yet he had worked in darkness, but now he changed the programme.

He struck a match on the wall and held it above his head, then he threw it from him to see it sink down, down until it burned on the floor of a cavern far below.

"The fools may not have found out one thing," said Golliday with a smile "that life can be sustained in the Trap. Nature has

made some changes here within the last few years. She has chisled here and there, and where death used to lurk one can breathe. The match tells me so. The match that quietly burned out down there tells this story."

The lighting of the lucifer had shown Golliday the brink of a precipice.

He now bent over it and struck another match.

This one he dropped down like the other, and watched it as it lit up the cavern into which it fell.

"I thought so," he exclaimed.

Gold Golliday unwound from his waist a rope which, when wholly out, was long enough to reach to the bottom of the cavern.

He made one end fast to a jagged rock, and then put his hands trumpet-like to his mouth.

"Dandy?" he called. "Dandy, I am here!"

At the third call something moved on one corner of the cavern and came staggering across the place.

"Blindfolded! I see," cried Gold Golliday.

"They thought they'd make it sure. But he's there and I'm here, and that means business."

The blinded boy tried to look up, but all was dark to him.

However, Gold Golliday's voice guided him to the rope, but there he stopped.

"Hands tied too, I see."

The old man felt of the lasso and nodded.

The next moment he had crawled over the edge of the wall and was going down hand over hand.

He dropped beside Detective Dandy with an exclamation of satisfaction.

In an instant the bandage was removed and the boy ferret's hands were free.

"They don't know the trap any more," grinned Gold Golliday. "They used to know it when it was death to be here; but Nature has taken a hand, and she generally does things up brown, you know, boy."

"I'll go up first," continued the Crusader, and suiting action to words he began to climb up the wall, after which Dandy Nugget did the same.

"I've been successful," said Golliday.

"I overtook Black-Handed Saul. Fortune favored me, and I came up with the fellow right where I wanted him."

"What happened, Golliday?"

"I circumvented him. That's what I went after, eh, Dandy?"

The boy smiled.

"I have it here—the parchment chart which belonged to Nabob Paul, and which was taken from the iron safe in the mine after the murder. That chart shows the way to the lost mine of Silver Water, the one whose existence was Paul's secret. With it in his hands all the way, Black-Handed Saul would have made the whole band millionaires."

"But now—"

"Now," said Golliday clutched Dandy's arm. "Now they may be beggars, every one."

"Did you—"

"No, I didn't do that," interrupted Golliday. "I didn't go for blood but for this chart."

"Then Black-Handed Saul—"

"Never fear. That man is out of the game. He will never serve Captain Mascot again."

Dandy Nugget said no more, and the pair made their way to the mouth of the mine.

"They thought they had fixed you, Nugget. They do not know what time has done in the heart of this old trap. Where there was death there is now pure air, and where there was no breathing at all, one can fill his lungs with the purest oxygen in the world."

"That is true; the air down in the cavern was pure."

Golliday escorted Dandy Nugget to his little shanty, where he turned suddenly upon him.

"You have the bead still, Dandy?"

"I have it yet."

"Let me see it again."

The Boy Shadow drew out the little purse which contained the black bead and rolled it into Golliday's hand.

"Whose armlet lost it think you?" grinned the old man looking at Dandy Nugget.

"What is your guess, Golliday?"

The old Crusader looked nonplused a moment and then his brow cleared.

"There are five of them here, no, not all here for Saul won't show up," he remarked. "Saul didn't lose his bead, that I know, for I counted his strand."

"It contained thirty-nine, did it?"

"Thirty-nine. Here, look for yourself."

Gold Golliday took something from his pocket and handed it to the boy.

It was an armlet of black beads and Dandy Nugget counted them, watched eagerly by the giant near by.

There were just thirty-nine beads and all were of one size and blackness.

"This armlet is intact," said Dandy Nugget, looking up. "The wearer did not kill Paul Paget."

"That's as true as Gospel," was the response. "The assassin has but thirty-eight beads in his strand."

The young Vidocq made no reply.

"Now," continued Golliday, "the beads on the other arms must be counted."

"That would tell the tale."

"They must be counted in the presence of all No-Luck."

"That would be pretty bold."

"Yes. What was your plan?"

"First in secret, then openly."

"I see. You want to make sure of it, boy. That's right. But you see an old man like me on a hot-headed crusade, might spoil the broth. I leave it to you."

Dandy Nugget turned the beads over and over in his hands. He was closely regarded by Golliday who refrained from speaking as if he did not care to break in upon the boy's thoughts.

"There is Redflint and Tolliver," said the youth, at last.

"Hank and the captain," finished Golliday.

"Four men and four bracelets of beads," replied the boy detective. "Mine is a little clue, but it tells the story of how Paul died."

"As plainly as if it had been a living witness. That black bead talks, Dandy."

The listener nodded and looked up at the face quite near his and seamed with interest.

"Do you really want to know what became of Black-Handed Saul, Mascot's right bower?" asked Golliday.

"Not if you don't care to disclose the secret," was the answer.

"If that is your secret keep it, Golliday. You say you overtook the man with the stolen chart, and you say, further, that he will never come back to fight for Captain Mascot."

"All this is true. I found him: I went for that purpose. It belonged to my crusade. Well, Dandy, do you think he gave up the chart peaceably?"

"I cannot think that he did."

"He did not. But I shed no blood. Neither did I throttle the fiend of the black hand. I merely sent him down the mountain."

"Down the mountain, Golliday?"

A grim smile came to the sun-browned face of Gold Golliday.

"Ten years ago," said he, while the expression lingered. "Ten years ago a young man fell among the vultures of the Silver Range. He was lucky up to that time; he had a mine and held golden secrets. He was

tied to a log by those human vultures, and sent rolling down the mountain. Time makes all things even. It will see the end of Gold Golliday's crusade. That's the sort of ride Black-Handed Saul took. I didn't kill the human vulture, oh, no. I only sent him after his victim of ten years ago—Golliday's brother!"

Dandy Nugget did not speak.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MISSING BEAD.

The old crusaders waited for Dandy Nugget to reply to his last remarks, but seeing that he kept silence he went on:

"They would call that murder in some parts of this country, but it was only vengeance. It was simply paying off an old debt and settling with one of the vultures who killed the boy miner of the Silver Range. One by one the rest shall feel the hand of Gold Golliday unless something unseen comes between."

"Don't they suspect you?" asked the boy.

"They suspect me now. They believe that I am the brother of the youth whom they sent to his death down the rugged sides of Old Man's Mountain. They will know it before they die. Black-Handed Saul found it out before the log started. He must have lived over that day while rushing with lightning speed down the mountain over and over to the bottom. Call you it murder, Dandy?"

"No," said the boy detective, laying his hand on the old Crusader's arm. "It was justice."

"Thank you, boy, thank you," was the answer. "Now we must go to work. The strand with thirty-eight beads must be found. It is No-Luck Camp."

Golliday went to the little window alongside the shanty-door and looked out for a moment.

He saw the lights that shone from the interior of the Black Eagle and smiled while he watched the place.

"Do you know what brought Boulder Belle to No-Luck?" he suddenly asked. Dandy Nugget shook his head.

"Vengeance!" was the reply as Gold Golliday came back across the floor. "That woman seeks to break Captain Mascot up, and then, tiger-like, she will begin to rend him. But it must not be. Whether his arm or another's bears the broken strand, she must not carry out her plans. Already she has robbed him of one hundred shares of his best bonanza, but it must go no further."

"Stop her if you can!"

"I can and I will!" was the quick response. "I will see this woman right away."

"You know where to find her."

Golliday went out.

"A strange man, and one with a heart for all," muttered the boy, who saw his dark figure moving from the shanty. "He will go to Belle and to Vinon, and they will learn from him first that I have been rescued from the heart of the trap, and that she (Belle) must not carry out the vengeance that brought her to No-Luck."

Golliday went straight to the home of the camp waif.

It was late, but he found its inmates up.

"I have found Dandy. I knew I would," grinned the old Crusader. "Nature has played havoc with the depths of Hank's trap, and he was there waiting for me."

Vinon uttered a cry of joy, but the face of Boulder Belle grew troubled.

It seemed to her as if victory was about to be snatched from her grasp.

Golliday came up to her and his dark hand fell softly upon her wrist.

"You must not till we have made the search," said he.

"What search?"

"The search for the missing bead," was

the retort. "We are going to look at every strand in No-Luck."

"You are," and Belle drew back and gave him a look of incredulity. "It may be all right, but how are you going to get a peep at their arms?"

"Wait and see. We are going to have counted the beads on the various armlets, and the one which contains but thirty-eight will have to bear inspection by the whole camp."

"Those men won't let you look," cried the woman. "Do you expect Captain Mascot and his men to show up at your command? It will never do, Golliday."

For a moment the old Crusader did not speak, but his look wandered toward the door and he took a long breath.

"One half of No-Luck already belongs to Captain Mascot," continued Boulder Belle.

"You mean that he has secured the men?"

"Yes; they belong to him. They have fallen into his net with the least possible effort."

"Is this true, girl?"

The question was addressed to Vinon.

"I fear it is," was the reply. "Captain Mascot knows how to rule men like the miners of No-Luck. He seems to fascinate them like a serpent fascinates the dove. At least they have been talking less about vengeance for the murder than ever before."

"It makes no difference," cried Gold Golliday, clinching his hands. "If all go over to the rascal's side—if even Dandy Nugget deserts me, vengeance shall be taken all the same. It is my crusade—mine alone—and while one of the gang has just taken a ride down the mountain, the others shall not escape."

"I am with you," and Belle sprung to Golliday's side, but he pushed her away.

"Not while you meditate your peculiar vengeance," he said. "You can fleece the Nabob King out of shares but you shall not take his life!"

"It is your command. I refuse to obey."

She drew off and looked defiantly at the old man standing in the middle of the room.

Golliday did not move for a minute, and then he only seemed to bend his body toward Boulder Belle while his face grew pale in the lamplight.

"I know all about your grievance," said he. "I know of the oath and the hunt you have had. But you lost no brother at the hands of the human vultures, and you shall not strike till I have struck."

"The door is yonder," and the hand of the speaker covered the portal. "Out yonder lies the trail and you seem to be near the end of it. No-Luck has been crying for vengeance for the death of Nabob Paul, and Dandy Nugget, the boy detective, has been brought to camp to ferret out the red hand. Out yonder, I say, lies the trail and the penalty. Go and finish it!"

He looked at her but made no answer.

"I make no promises" she went on. "I will not say what I will do. You know what brought me to No-Luck and you want to strike first. Let it be a race to the goal, Golliday; I have nothing against you, but the man out yonder—the wretch who calls himself Captain Mascot—must feel the hand that slays."

The old Crusader went to the door, but there he stopped and once more looked at the beautiful woman.

"I never war on woman," said he in low tones. "The memory of my mother is as sacred to me now as it was when we laid her to rest on the mountain-side. But you must not interfere; no, you must not."

It was a threat and a challenge, and Boulder Belle understood it.

"It is my crusade and when I have struck, you shall be avenged with Paul and the rest."

"Would that satisfy you, Golliday, if you were me?"

"Never mind that," and the door was suddenly jerked open. "It must satisfy you, woman."

He was gone and Boulder Belle and Vinon were left alone.

For a minute they looked at one another without speaking and the woman—the vengeance-hunter of the West—sprung over to the girl, and cried:

"I can't let this man go and strike. It would be violating my oath."

"But he will avenge all of us," answered Vinon. "What can you do as against Captain Mascot and the Black Beads?"

"Ah, you don't know Boulder Belle! You may have heard of me and you have seen something of me since I struck No-Luck Camp; but you don't know me, girl."

"I confess that I do not, but that man will terminate his crusade with a play that will shatter the hopes of the red-handed."

The woman drew back and for a moment stood undecided before Vinon.

"She is going to yield," thought the girl. "She will let Gold Golliday go ahead."

Half a second later Vinon found herself alone, Boulder Belle having rushed from the cabin and she could hear her in the street outside.

The breathless girl fled over to the couch in one corner of the room and threw herself upon it.

"There will be dark times here now," she thought. "There will be a clashing of steel and a struggle for existence and I will be in the midst of it all."

When she looked from the house she saw nothing but the lights and shadows of the Plaza.

Beyond it loomed the hotel and a little further on the home of Captain Mascot.

Vinon stood at the window a while and shuddered.

She could not see the man who stood like a statue in the night with his bearded face turned toward Captain Mascot's abode nor could she get a glimpse of the figure just as motionless and silent that hugged the shadows a few yards away with something in one hand which now and then caught the gloom of the few stars that lit up the vault of night.

Presently the front door of Captain Mascot's house opened and a man came out.

Golliday saw him at once and waiting like a lion in ambush he permitted him to come within arm's reach of him.

All at once the hand of the old Crusader touched the man and he stopped abruptly.

It was Redflint and his hand moved toward his hip, but the eye of Golliday seemed to arrest it.

"It is Golliday," said the old man. "You have just left your master."

"What is that to you?"

"Much, perhaps, and a good deal to both of us."

"You are the Crusader—the man who came here to give us trouble."

"That is my mission; but, Redflint, you will step over to the cabin with me."

"To your shanty?"

"Yes."

Dangerous was the smile that played with the desperado's lips, but he nodded.

As Golliday threw wide the door revealing the form of Dandy Nugget the man stopped and gave a quick cry.

"It's the boy!" cried the Crusader. "Now take off your coat and show your black strand!"

Redflint exhibited a disposition to be stubborn.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HAND IN THE WINDOW.

The light in the shanty revealed everything there, and Redflint saw that the Crusader stood between him and the door.

He did not ask how Dandy Nugget had escaped from the trap, but he wondered.

"Take off your coat!" came the stern command from Gold Golliday's lips.

A revolver was gripped by the dark hand that hung alongside the speaker's hip, and Dandy Nugget waited with an eagerness born of vengeance.

Redflint seemed to hesitate, for he did not move, and even planted himself on the ground with more firmness than before.

"You will time this man, Dandy?" said Golliday. "I will give him a minute. The arm must be bared in that time, or the circle of rascality and crime shall be broken."

Redflint seemed to think fast.

There was no escaping the man who had caught him. He knew that Golliday had him in his hands, and that a refusal to do as commanded would stretch him on the ground a corpse.

Sullenly at last he began to disrobe.

He drew his coat and threw it upon the table, but there he stopped.

"Open the sleeve to the shoulder!" said Golliday.

The man fell back with an oath.

"Never; not for any living man!" he cried.

"Very well," and the lips of the old Crusader met. "Just as you say, Redflint. The arm will be bared before you leave this shanty, and a living arm is better than a dead one."

He knew what these words meant. He knew that the man into whose eyes he looked was as desperate and determined as ever man had been, and so he threw back his sleeve.

The peeling of the dark arm revealed an armlet midway between elbow and shoulder.

It was the black strand.

"Take the light and count them, Dandy," said Golliday.

The boy ferret picked up the lamp and approached Redflint.

"Hold your arm out and let the boy be accurate," continued the old man.

Redflint did so, and Dandy Nugget counted the beads—thirty-nine in all.

"You haven't lost any," said Golliday when the counting had ended. "You have the original number, and that is saying something for your character."

There was no reply to these words, and the sleeve fell back to its place.

"Where is Tolliver?" asked Golliday.

"You may go out and look for him as you looked for me," was the answer.

"He will be found with the rest of them. Never mind. The beads on every arm will be counted and the missing one discovered."

"What missing one?"

It was plain to be seen that this question was asked in good faith.

"You don't know, eh?" said Golliday. "You will know, Redflint. You know who killed Paul as you are the rightful custodian of the other secrets of the Black Beads. Wait and see."

"I am free now, am I?"

Golliday was about to reply when a crash of glass was heard and he turned to see a hand thrust through the window near the door and in that hand was a six-shooter fully cocked and menacing.

"Come out, Redflint!" said a voice.

The face of the speaker was visible at that moment. It was just behind the revolver and both Golliday and Dandy Nugget saw that it was dark and stern.

"Come out here, Redflint," was the repeated command. "The hand that keeps you back falls dead at its owner's side."

Dandy Nugget knew the face on the outside.

The coolest of the cool-heads next to Captain Mascot himself was there—Tolliver, the King of Trumps.

The revolver covered Gold Golliday and the old Crusader, white-faced but all nerves and coolness, looked into it without a tremor. Redflint went toward the door.

He was not stopped and in a second he had thrown it open and was across the threshold.

But the hand in the window was as rigid as ever, and the face that backed it up as dark as before.

"The die has been cast!" said Tolliver. "The time for the final settlement has come, Golliday. You will pray, if ever you do that sort of thing."

The Crusader knew what this meant.

He was to be shot down in his tracks; the man at the window was not in the humor to spare, and acting on the advice if not the commands of his master, he had come not only to rescue but to kill.

Golliday with his own weapon firmly gripped was held at a disadvantage which could not be helped just then.

He looked over the leveled revolver and into the face of Tolliver, reading no mercy there.

Yes, the die had been cast and Gold Golliday had reached the end of his crusade.

To all of this Detective Dandy paid breathless attention, waiting for a chance to turn the tables on the camp desperadoes, but there was none.

"The kid is harmless with the old man out of the way," said Tolliver to the man at his side, and then he looked at Gold Golliday once more.

"You've had your chance before this," he said. "You have been on this crusade for years, but you have waited too long. We are not all here, but we are strong enough. You are going now."

The finger at the trigger seemed to crook in the light and the next moment there was a deafening report.

Dandy Nugget saw Golliday fall from the window and drop upon his knees.

The table was struck by the falling body and overturned and the light went out.

The interior of the shanty was filled with smoke and the boy ferret, knocked across the room by the toppling table, fell against the wall with his weapon in his hand.

"It's the last of the old Crusader," said a voice outside. "Now back to the captain, Redflint."

But Dandy Nugget was at the half open door and his lithe figure was bent across the step.

He saw the stalwart figures of the Black Beads in the starlight and his blood grew hot.

The thought of Golliday, his friend and helper, lying dead on the ground roused his whole nature.

He threw up his hand and covered one of the forms, but that moment his arm was seized and he saw some one at his side.

"Not those targets, Dandy Nugget. You have no right to them."

He looked again and shook the speaker loose.

It was Boulder Belle.

"They belong to me, those men and their master."

"They belong to the hand that gets them first!"

Dandy Nugget was in the starlight, free of the door, but the men were gone.

The woman laughed at this and turned toward the shanty.

"I heard the shot," she exclaimed. "Did they try to get you?"

"No, they killed Golliday."

Dandy Nugget and the woman went back to the cabin and the Boy Shadow struck a light.

All was quiet inside.

"It is true. He is dead," said Belle, bending over the figure on the ground. "Thus ends the old man's crusade."

But that moment the eyes opened and the big hands opened and shut.

"He lives!" cried Dandy Nugget. "Tolliver Trumps failed to kill though he shot at three feet."

Golliday raised himself and stood against the wall with blood on his face and his eyes starting and terrible in expression.

"A fool loses nerve at the last moment," grinned the Crusader. "He trembled while he pressed the trigger and he didn't end the crusade."

Boulder Belle looked regretful, but the hand of Dandy Nugget clutched Golliday's arm and his look was full of joy.

The old man tore open his shirt and showed the mark of the bullet, a ghastly furrow between arm and side.

"Not missed at two steps, but not killed," said he. "This, woman, is the work of one of your vultures."

There was no reply.

"We saw one arm, eh, Detective Dandy, and it wore all the beads."

"Whose was it?" asked Boulder Belle.

"Redflint's."

"There are others which you will never inspect."

"Think you so, woman?"

"I am sure of it! This night marks you, Gold Golliday."

"So it does, but it marks them as well. Let me see. Why wait till morning? We will call together the Red Vigilantes."

The woman seemed to fall back in the light, and from near the door she looked at Golliday with stareful eyes.

"Why, man," she exclaimed, "that Order does not exist in No-Luck."

"You shall see. You may not know that the Red Vigilantes are scattered all over the West. Its members are here there and everywhere. You have seen the Order's work. You may know that it took vengeance for a crime in Camp Tartar when no one thought a single member of the Order was there."

"But No-Luck can't show up any Reds."

"What is this?" and Gold Golliday opened his shirt still more and showed Boulder Belle a mark on his dark bosom from which she recoiled.

"I am one. There are twenty of us here. I have signaled all and we are brothers still. Ten is a Court and twenty is a Death Circle. Fate or fortune, call it what you please, brought us together here; but I would not call upon them until the last moment. You know what will happen. Redflint knows what we are after. He knows why Dandy Nugget came to No-Luck. Captain Mascot knows as well, so does Tolliver and Hawk. The missing bead tells the tale of guilt. Every man suspected shall be bared to the Court. Go out and take your vengeance, if you will, but that of the Red Vigilantes is at hand and Paul is to be avenged if it takes more blood than courses through Golliday's veins."

"I accept the challenge," cried Boulder Belle, retreating toward the door. "I will go out and strike before you can call the Reds together."

There was no answer but a smile, and as the white-faced creature flitted through the door Golliday turned to Dandy Nugget and hid the mark of the Vigilantes from view.

The end was near at hand.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BROTHERHOOD'S BRAND.

GOLLIDAY'S revelation concerning the Red Vigilantes more than astonished Boulder Belle.

She had heard of the dread organization and had even witnessed some of its avenging work in other parts of the far West, but she had no idea that it had representatives in No-Luck Camp, least of all that Golliday belonged to it.

She resolved to strike and anticipate the work of Gold Golliday and his companions, and with this end in view she abruptly left the shanty.

The old Crusader believed this.

He felt that the avenging creature would be none too bold to dash into Captain Mas-

cot's house and confront that worthy and his friends with her revolver.

There was no time to lose, but leaving Boulder Belle, let us follow Redflint and Tolliver.

These two worthies hurried toward their master's house.

Captain Mascot awaited them with Hank Hawk for a companion and the two burst into the room with some excitement in their eyes.

Tolliver seemed to get all his nerve back the moment he spied the cool face of his master.

"I have finished the old crow this time," said he, as he came up to the table. "He had Redflint in the toils, had him in his fist, you see, when I put my arm through the window and let drive at him."

Hawk almost sprung from the table but Captain Mascot did not move.

"He had you, eh, Redflint?" he asked.

"Did he catch you napping?"

Redflint hung his head a moment and those who watched the man saw him bite his lip.

"He caught me not napping but with his accused stratagem which I don't care to talk about," he growled.

"What did he do?" Redflint looked at Tolliver and that worthy bent forward:

"Redflint resisted as long as he could, captain, but the menace of a six-shooter is something one can't always withstand, you see."

"Did he get the secret?"

"No, not that," retorted Redflint. "That I would never surrender!" He made me show the beads."

"Oh," a cynical smile came to Captain Mascot's mouth. "He made you show up, eh?"

"Yes."

"Who else was there?—any one?"

"The boy."

"What boy? Not—"

A silence almost palpable filled the room. Captain Mascot had not heard till then of Dandy Nugget's escape from the old mine.

"The bird we had in the snare, captain," confessed Redflint. "The mine must have undergone a great change since Captain Tebbs died there. The boy is out, and he counted the beads while Gold Golliday kept me covered with the revolver."

"Why should he count the beads? They ought to know that there are thirty-nine, no more, no less."

"But he counted them."

The Nabob King turned to Tolliver Trumps.

"Why count them?" he asked that person, who stood with folded arms.

"Let Redflint go on."

"They say that there is an armlet which has one bead less than the required number."

"Who says so?"

"Golliday."

"Is that true?"

"I don't know."

"What if there is a short strand?" and Captain Mascot's face became a study.

"I don't quite understand it."

"Neither do I. But you say you finished him?"

"I missed him on horseback, you know, but on foot—I brought the game cock down!"

There was a grin of satisfaction on Tolliver's face.

"You are certain of this, eh, Tolliver?"

"I never miss a man at that distance."

"True—it was a shot which a blind man could have made. Now the boy is without a partner."

"Unless the woman joins him."

"Boulder Belle, the robber? Ah, we must look to that. She robbed me, you know."

"Of the shares, yes. But why fear the rest of them? You have No-Luck at your heels, captain."

The Nabob King nodded.

"It looks that way, but I have made a strange discovery."

"Here in camp?"

"Here."

All three looked at their master, who opened a drawer in the table.

They saw him take from it a little roll of buckskin which he unwrapped with deliberation.

Out rolled a tiny branding-iron.

Captain Mascot placed it over a bit of paper and struck it with his hard clinched hand, then he looked up while his men bent forward and inspected the marks on the sheet.

They were not very distinct, but still they were discernible.

Tolliver was the first to speak.

"It is the brand of the Red Vigilantes!" he exclaimed.

"Where was it found?" asked Hawk.

"On a shelf in the boy's mine," was the reply. "I found it in the dark, accidentally of course, but my hand must have been guided thither by some strange fate. I found it two hours ago."

"How came it there?"

Mascot shook his head.

"Can it be that some of the R. V.'s are here?" asked Redflint.

"I don't think so. The Order is widespread, you know; we have had dealings with it, but not in this part of the country. I have seen none of the members for years; but here at this time I come across the brand of the brotherhood. You know something of it, Tolliver. You know the dreadful oath which can never be dissolved; you know that the members are compelled to answer a call from any brother and that ten form a Court and twenty a Death Circle."

The dark faced Tolliver Trumps nodded.

He picked up the branding-iron and handled it in the light.

"It is rusty," he said.

"It has lain in the mine some time."

"Hidden by a passing Vigilante perhaps."

"I don't know."

The iron was examined in turn by the others and restored to the table by Hank Hawk.

"You have met with no signs from any one in No-Luck that we have them here?" asked Tolliver.

"I have not. The men seem to be coming over to us rapidly, and but for Golliday, this boy ferret and the she serpent from the Southwest, we would be on the last wave crest now."

"Crush them all!" and the hand of Redflint struck the table with desperate emphasis.

"Death to all who oppose the Black Beads!" cried Hawk.

Tolliver Trumps did not move. With folded arms he seemed to study the branding-iron as if it recalled some unpleasant memories of the past.

"The death of Golliday will settle the question of the Red Vigilantes being in camp," he said at last.

"This proves that they have been here."

"Paul Paget may have been one. It was found in his mine, you know."

"Yes, over the door leading to his private office."

Tolliver looked across the room and seemed to take in a long breath.

"I won't believe they are here till I face them," said he. "The Order never reached this part of the West. It flourished further South, and when it lost Captain Irion, its head, it seemed to pass out of existence."

"Let it be so. Now to your posts. Ere this, perhaps, No-Luck has heard all about your shot, Tolliver. They are discussing it

at the Black Eagle, and the Boy Shadow may try to inflame the public heart; but we can throttle him."

"Easily," laughed Redflint.

Five minutes later Captain Mascot was alone.

The old branding-iron lay before him, and his gaze was fastened upon it as if he were reading its history.

It was the mark of the Red Vigilantes!

Once branded with that iron, always marked.

The black beads could be stripped from the arm and cast to the wind, but not so the brand.

Mascot picked the brand up and looked at it attentively.

All at once he put it down and left the room.

In another part of the house, with curtains down and everything closed tight, he threw off his coat.

In another instant he had stripped up his sleeve and was looking at the black strand on his left arm.

The beads glistened in the light like black diamonds, and he seemed to smile while he contemplated them.

"I'll settle the question in a moment," cried he. "I will see if I lost any. It can't be, though. They must have lied. It is a false find by the young ferret who gets out of traps and escapes death underground."

He stripped from his arm the beads, and bent toward the table with the armlet in his hand.

His lips were welded and his breath came hard.

Suddenly the sound of broken glass filled his ears, and as he started up, with the circlet nearly dropping from his hands, his eyes appeared to leap from his head.

There was a face at the shattered window, and in front of it was a six-shooter, which looked vengeance from its muzzle.

It was in the hands of Gold Golliday.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DOOM OF THE QUARTETTE.

"PUT on the beads, captain!"

Captain Mascot was disinclined to obey, but the glowering face at the still and the terrible menace of the revolver told him that he was dealing with one not in a merciful mood.

Over his naked arm the man slipped the circlet, and then looked at Gold Golliday.

"We will count them in court," continued the old Crusader. "We will see that they are counted correctly, and you shall have fair play, though you don't deserve it."

At this moment there came across the Plaza behind Golliday a sound which Captain Mascot heard with dashed hopes.

"You've heard that cry afore, cap'n?" suggested Golliday.

"Who has not who has been where I have?" was the reply.

"Come, out, then. You needn't take the door for it. The window is low and you can get out nicely."

The captain of the Black Beads went forward, and alighting on the ground below the window he stood before Gold Golliday in the starlight.

Just beyond shone the lights of the Black Eagle, and one could see moving figures there.

The porch was crowded with men, and when Golliday turned in that direction with his prisoner, Captain Mascot looked into his face with a mute question.

"Tollivar has had two cracks at me," explained Gold Golliday.

"The first time he scraped me; to-night he drew a good deal of blood, but his hand shook at the wrong moment. It won't do for hands to shake then, captain."

There was no reply and the men walked on.

Perhaps the Black Bead wondered why he did not see anything of Tolliver, Hawk and Redflint.

His eye took in everything as he advanced, and at last he was seen to start.

There were three red shirts on the porch close together, and his gaze became riveted upon these.

His followers were there.

"You see we have the others," remarked Golliday, interpreting Mascot's look. "The boys are in good hands. They will get a fair hearing. The R. V.'s never condemn a man without cause."

Mascot started. It was true, then! the branding-iron of the old Brotherhood had told a straight story.

No-Luck Camp contained some of the Red Vigilantes, and he was about to be tried for his life by them!

The night was half gone and the stars were denoting the first hours of another day, though day had not come.

Captain Mascot found nearly the whole complement of No-Luck Camp on the Plaza.

Men whom he had drawn into his net, men who had promised him to mine his sunken shafts and who had engaged themselves to work for him, were there.

Dark shirts and bronzed faces were everywhere.

Captain Mascot looked about for a face he did not see.

On the porch stood Dandy Nugget, but he was not the person for whom he looked.

What had become of Boulder Belle?

If the men of No-Luck had assembled to try him and to see him tried, why was the woman absent?

It was a question the man could not answer.

Golliday marched to the very edge of the long porch with his prisoner.

The old Crusader showed that he had won a victory.

"This is Captain Mascot!" cried he as he waved his hand toward the handsome captive. "This is the man who has sailed under a dozen names in other parts of the country, but with that we have nothing to do."

"This is the Court of the Red Vigilantes. All members will hold up their right hands."

Seven and thirty hands went up!

The Nabob King looked at his companions and a faint smile appeared at the corners of his mouth.

Thirty-seven Reds in No-Luck Camp?

What was it?—fate or vengeance?

"There stands before us the murderer of Paul Paget," continued Golliday. "The boy miner was killed a few nights since and I found his body near his mine."

"I carried it to the Black Eagle and afterward saw it carried to the mountain for burial. The boy stood in some one's way. He had an enemy, but who that enemy was let the proof show."

The dread court organized then and there without any show of ostentation.

The lights which had been carried from the hotel shone over the crowd and the rough men, cool and determined, took their allotted places.

No particular man was accused.

The four figures, giant-like and dark of features, stood side by side, watched by men whose hands remained upon the butts of their revolvers.

"Dandy Nugget?" called the selected "prosecutor," and the boy detective came forward.

He told of his coming to No-Luck Camp at Gold Golliday's instigation; how he had undertaken to ferret out the mystery of Paul Paget's death, and how he had found a clue which might lead to the detection of the guilty.

Of his adventure in the boy's mine—his meeting with Captain Mascot there, and his capture and imprisonment in the old mine-trap, he said nothing.

This might be a second chapter in his startling narrative.

Dandy Nugget took from his bosom a bit of paper which he unwrapped.

In his open palm glittered the fateful black bead found where Golliday discovered the body of the boy nabob.

"It is the black bead of the brotherhood of the West," exclaimed the boy. "It belongs to a strand which must now lack one bead. The thirty-nine beads of the brotherhood are too well known for me to speak of them."

"Let the arms of the prisoners be bared," cried the bronzed judge of the mountain court.

Captain Mascot looked at his companions and saw them taking off their coats.

He himself hesitated.

In a minute all four arms were bared and men were counting the circlets as they were taken off.

Thirty-nine on Tolliver's strand.

Thirty-nine on Hawk's.

Thirty-nine on Redflint's.

All eyes turned to Captain Mascot.

Three men were counting his beads a second time.

"Thirty-eight!" cried one of the tellers.

There was a bitter murmur of rage and then silence.

One of the tellers was holding the strand up in the light.

All saw it.

"There are thirty-eight beads on this strand. It belongs to Captain Mascot. The bead Dandy, the detective, found where Paul Paget lay, will complete the circlet!"

Just then a sound that struck all ears crossed the Plaza.

"Vengeance is mine in spite of the court of No-Luck!" and there came forward a woman whose face was white and whose mien was exciting.

Boulder Belle had come upon the scene!

But, strong arms seized her and she was pinioned before she could reach the man already condemned.

"No," said Golliday. "This is the wind-up of my crusade. It is the night of my revenge!"

It is three months later.

No-Luck Camp wears the same appearance, and the occupants of the Black Eagle's porch have the same looks, and sport the same untidy garb.

No one mentions the fate of the Black Beads; no one talks about the confession made by Captain Mascot in the Plaza, three months previously.

Already they seem to have forgotten the doom of the four men who came to No-Luck to wrench the ten mines from Paul Paget, whose death was justly laid at Captain Mascot's door by Dandy Nugget, the Boy Shadow of No-Luck Camp; it seems as if the tragic ending of the drama has already slipped from human memory.

Paul's mines have been handed over to Vinon, the waif who has turned out to be Boulder Belle's niece, and the girl has installed as manager over them, Dandy Nugget, while Golliday, having reached the end of his "crusade," passes his time on the scene of his vengeance, saying now and then that he will stay there till "the young folks hitch, as he sure they will do."

The Red Vigilantes have fallen back into seclusion, and not a few of them wonder if they didn't break a part of the code when they promised to obey Captain Mascot, the Nabob King, whom they sent to the rope with his four desperate comrades of the Black Beads.

THE END.

NEXT HALF-DIME LIBRARY, NO. 906!

SAFETY SAM, the CYCLE SPORT.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.